The Need For Interstitial Resistance To Normalizing Power.

A Foucauldian And Laingian Reading Of Jennifer Dawson's Fiction Of The 1960s And '70s

By Alexandra Davey

Queen Mary
University Of London

PhD Thesis

PAGE NUMBERING AS ORIGINAL

Abstract

The thesis will show how Jennifer Dawson's fiction of the 1960s and '70s explores the effects of the overlapping dialects of the normalizing discourse, interlocking manifestations of constraint that consolidate themselves through internalization on a continuum that underpins, generates, perpetuates and constitutes perceptions of 'the social.' A Laingian reading of the scapegoating of perceived dissenters, to invalidate or ideally to pre-empt implied dissent and to confirm in their membership the members of 'the group,' will be applied to illuminate the response provoked by Dawson's protagonists, semantically discredited by a continuum of coercive structures that range from the psychiatric to the dynamic of individual relationships. A Foucauldian analysis of the transition of the maintenance of the *status quo* from identifiable applications of force to democratized formulations of normalizing power to an internalization of the panoptic principle will further contextualize the dilemmas and tensions of Dawson's protagonists, on whose experience Procrustean identities are systematically if subtly imposed.

A Foucauldian perspective will be used to cast light on the feelings of deadlock addressed in the novels, where the tendency of power to incite identification makes a locus of authentic resistance elusive and hard to sustain. This perspective will also inform how Dawson's fiction dramatizes the futility of resistance that fails to engage at the level of form and which thus reinforces power's underlying paradigm, even on the sites of its ostensible subversion. The thesis will demonstrate how her novels increasingly reflect the Laingian concept of contextual intelligibility, revealing how the targets and transmission wires of the normalizing drive are fully enmeshed in power's dynamic structure.

Foucault's emphasis on the interstitial will be applied to show how, in her fiction of the '70s, the mutual impact of individual lives is portrayed as not only constraining but also as potentially inspiring. Her protagonists move towards a conscious awareness of the need to forge and activate an interstitial perspective, symbolized initially by music, from which to transcend collusion with the normalizing drive. Only when 'freedom' is understood to be not a destination but an attitude of mind do her protagonists emerge from the impasse of complicity and develop a receptiveness to genuine exchange and a view of themselves as more than merely acted upon but as potential definers and inhabitants of their experience.

Contents

Introduction

Jennifer Dawson's fiction of the 1960s and '70s, which presents a range of responses to increasingly subtle forms of constraint, moves from exploring freedom as a concept to socially and politically contextualizing it. Despite the confusions and negative connotations that have accrued around the notion of individual liberty (encapsulated in Greer's contention that 'freedom in an unfree world is merely licence to exploit'),[1] the tautological nature of the term 'an unfree world' should not be seen to compromise the validity of the concept. Dawson's later protagonists come to see their freedom, which is always a goal to be attained rather than an existing state, as inseparable from the urge to envisage ways of thinking which could form the foundations of a world that would cease to be unfree.

Foucault defined liberty as 'the ontological condition of ethics,'[2] but this assertion could also be usefully reversed. As Dawson's fiction implies, any conception of freedom that fails to consider the ethical can only be a diversion, programmed to block, in the long term, a collective and authentic liberty. Yet while the use of *force* as a means of suppressing freedom tends to provoke indignation, operations of *power* are more insidious and hence less likely to be fully understood. Corruptions of the democratic ideal, in Chomsky's words, have a message that 'is simple and straightforward. You are free to do what you want, as long as it is what we want you to do.'[3] As Dawson's novels reveal, the channels through which this ideology operates require more sustained and informed negotiation if the questioning individual is not to be subsumed and neutralized.

---

[1] Greer, G., *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999), p. 6
[2] Bernauer, J. & D. Rasmussen (eds.), *The Final Foucault* (London: The MIT Press, 1994), p. 4

Dawson's fiction moves from addressing responses to force to examining reactions to the phenomenon Chomsky defines as 'free choice with a pistol to your head.'[4] This trend in Dawson's novels is elucidated by a Foucauldian analysis of power and resistance. When the pistol acquires an internalized form, its bullets being fired from within and their impact being experienced as a general force and not as a series of localized assaults, resistance must update its manœuvres. Foucault therefore argues that resistance must initially proceed from within, adopt a micropolitical form and be manifested interstitially. As Dawson's later fiction implies, the preservation of the individual is a prerequisite for collective social change, for any collectivity that ignores the individual is doomed to perpetuate the abuses of power that it mobilized itself to overcome.

As Plato cited wonder as the bedrock of philosophy, demystification springs from doubt. Foucault's analyses are imbued with the urge to defamiliarize techniques of normalization. In his own words, 'I play my role at the moment I make problems evident in all their complexity, by provoking doubts and uncertainties.'[5] While for Dawson's characters such doubts function as catalysts of crisis, they are also portrayed as a prerequisite of the potential for breakthrough. The uncertainty that defines her protagonists' perspective challenges the power of the *status quo*. As Foucault's analyses reveal, the demystification of techniques of suppression dismantle the myth of inevitability that underlies accepted modes of thought.

Like Foucault's writings, which deconstruct the myth of inevitability by describing its synchronic and diachronic consolidation, the works of "anti-psychiatry" excavate the drive towards unanimity, which creates a culture of submission. For

---

[3] Chomsky, N., *Deterring Democracy* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 347
[4] *Deterring Democracy*, p. 316

Laing and Szasz, psychiatry, as a synecdoche encapsulating this drive, is a symbolic discipline in whose name individual freedom is curtailed. Laing's case-studies, like Foucault's descriptions, transform techniques of fiction to examine the multiple channels through which alternative ways of thinking are pre-emptively suppressed. While all locate what is cast as deviant as a site of the convergence of applications of power, writers of "fiction," like Dawson, are arguably best equipped to explore how the marginal and marginalized directly experience these assaults.

However, Foucauldian and Laingian explorations of constraint contextualize the dilemmas of self-definition experienced by Dawson's protagonists.

The Ha-Ha[6] was first published in 1961, the year that saw the publication of *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault's first theoretical work. Both these texts are concerned with constraint: who is seen to require it, and how and why they are constrained. Furthermore, both writers posit a continuum where the normalizing strategies employed within institutions, specifically within the psychiatric hospital, consolidate the power operations by which the social is defined.

These works emerged at a distinct cultural moment, and each is an analysis of the pressure to conform. The sixties inaugurated a shift in perspective with regard to authority and specifically to psychiatric control, which began to be perceived as a ruse to justify the suppression of dissent. The growth of the "anti-psychiatry movement" encapsulated a general trend where the desire for individual autonomy and the concomitant mistrust of authority were altering attitudes to the relationship between the individual and "The State." For example, U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam

---

[5] *Remarks on Marx*, p. 162

[6] Dawson, J, *The Ha-Ha* (London: Anthony Blond, 1961)

focused the alienation of much of the populace, as represented by Will in Dawson's *A Field Of Scarlet Poppies*.

An increasing sense of alienation from structures of purported representation led, in various quarters, to experimentation with alternative modes of living, such as commune dwelling, and a realignment of perspective exemplified by drug-induced alterations in consciousness. Though these attempts at redefinition were minority pursuits, they exemplify a more general withdrawal from approved "ways of life." The pitfalls as well as the potential of such alternatives are explored in Dawson's fiction of the 1970s, *Strawberry Boy* and *A Field Of Scarlet Poppies*. These novels engage with the risk that such "rebellion" can paradoxically consolidate the *status quo* by creating an identifiable group of dissenters who can be invoked to justify reinforcement of social control. This phenomenon surfaces in Caryl Churchill's *Softcops* of 1978, which acknowledges the influence of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. In the play, a conspirator muses, 'Who plans the assassinations, us or them? Do we only murder so they can arrest us? [...] We think we're subversive. They allow us.'[7]

As the sixties gave way to the seventies, 'the upsurge of liberationist optimism' began to 'implode under the weight of its own contradictions,' producing a 'soberer recognition that the walls did not come tumbling down at the first sound of the trumpet.'[8] This is a situation that both Dawson and Foucault anticipate and to whose complexity they respond. Although it was only in the 1970s that these concerns, and those of the "anti-psychiatrists," made inroads into the currency of accepted ideas, it was in the sixties that the systematic undermining of faith in "authority" redefined the dynamic that bound the individual to the social. In the '50s,

---

[7] Churchill, C., *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996), p. 43

a mounting scepticism with regard to "official" politics gave rise to a retreat into family units, not yet diagnosed as microcosmic formulations of the normalization strategies that underpin the social. The phenomenon of the Holocaust, as Bruno Bettelheim and others have argued, began to be seen less as an aberration from than as an intensification of social control. The themes of anti-psychiatry, formulated in the late '50s, are deeply rooted in an awareness of and revolt against the social ideologies that with the aid of "science" found their apex in the concentration camps. These atrocities having both produced and exemplified the crisis of the individual's status in society, the associated moral dilemmas came to define the era to come. As Szasz contends,

> Viewed against the background of the history of psychiatry, there is a lesson in the history of the Holocaust that we have ignored. That lesson is that the aberrations of National Socialist medicine, which we ostensibly abhor, represent an exaggerated version of a type of conflict-resolution to which all modern nations are susceptible that seek medical-therapeutic solutions for their moral-social problems (Therapeutic States).[9]

As Dawson implies, most extensively in *The Ha-Ha,* the difference is one of degree. Szasz develops his point by contending that 'unlike Nazi psychiatrists, democratic psychiatrists do not literally kill their patients. They kill them metaphorically, by incarcerating, shocking, and drugging them.'[10] Yet neither the psychiatric abuse of power nor Nazi methods of social control are freak aberrations in an otherwise non-coercive social schema. Dawson's novels show that, just as the Holocaust represented a stepping up of annihilation under the guise of "science," involuntary "treatment" within the psychiatric machine represents not a departure from but an intensification of society's normalizing drive. Benjamin Rush, credited as

---

[8] Jones, C. & R. Porter (eds.), *Reassessing Foucault. Power, Medicine and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1

[9] Szasz, T., Address presented at the Foucault Symposium, University of Berlin, 1/5/98: published at http://www.fu-berlin.de/foucault-tribunal/indictment.htm

the founder of psychiatry, blithely acknowledged the link between social and psychiatric modes of the maintenance of constraint. Szasz and Laing expose the sinister implications of his perception of humanity 'as patients in a hospital. The more they resist our efforts to serve them, the more they have need of our services.'[11] Thus already in 1774 a veneer of psychiatric benevolence was employed to suppress the threat of individual liberty, a phenomenon Dawson implies to be the basis and purpose of social institutions.

Information reaching "the West" about the reality of Stalin's Russia exacerbated the crisis in attitudes to authority, as the individual was revealed to be fuel for the social system, rather than its beneficiary. As Nock warned, 'in proportion as you give the State power to do things *for* you, you give it power to do things *to* you; and the State invariably makes as little as it can of the one power, and as much as it can of the other.'[12] Hitherto perceived as an ethical alternative, "socialism" was revealed not a "withering away" but a glorification of authority and "The State." This is the context in which Dawson novelistically, like Foucault theoretically, highlights the dangers of substitution at the level of content as opposed to structural subversion.

"The fifties" can be seen as a time of paralysis, where the individual turned to domesticity as a means of political retreat, while the existentialist doctrine, as popularized by Sartre, came to be seen as a diagnostic of "the sixties," since the Sartrean subject is a potential definer of the world.

> The first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And, when we say that man is responsible for

---

[10] Szasz, T., *Cruel Compassion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994), p. 60
[11] Rush, B. (1774) , in J. A. Woods, "The Correspondence of Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp, 1773-1809," Journal of American Studies, 1: 8
[12] A. J. Nock (1943), quoted in Szasz, T., *Law, Liberty and Psychiatry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 237

himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.[13]

Dawson's fiction is increasingly defined by a profound awareness of the fundamental connection between responsibility and freedom. The psychic crises her protagonists undergo are inextricable from their personal alliances and from their relationship with "the social" as an entity. Far from being metaphysical quandaries suspended unencumbered in the void, their anxieties are reactions to the complex social world they traverse, whether in reality, imagination or memory, and whether within the family or the political domain.

The discipline of psychiatry had traditionally been viewed as a necessary device for suppressing any threat to the social network and, specifically, to the individuals constituting it. While prior to the sixties these two categories had generally been perceived to be synonymous, as this assumption wavered psychiatry began to be seen as a password for exclusion, its mantle of benevolence beginning to seem negligible at best. A conceptual parallel began to be discerned between, on the one hand, the military sacrifice in Vietnam of individuals to a political imperative and their subsequent ostracism (despite the fact that their participation had by no means always been voluntary) and, on the other, the incarceration of psychiatric patients. In other words, "the mentally ill" are scapegoated on two simultaneous levels; first being selected for exclusion on a pretext they are powerless to challenge, and then being held accountable for what befalls them once they are part of the machine. The multiple effects of these scapegoating strategies are a recurring theme throughout Dawson's fiction.

---

[13] Sartre, J.-P., *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by P. Mairet (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 29

As Foucault's theories demonstrate, the tendency of systems to be internalized as "truth" produces the need for micropolitical resistance. In the light of the loss of faith in the official discourse, alternative stories began to be told, countering accepted versions of truth and with an emphasis less on the individual in relation to the social world than on the individual as its complicitous upholder. Therefore, rather than "liberation" being seen to be latent in a radical readjustment of social structures, survival with one's autonomy intact became the focus of concern. Tensions sprang from the conflict between a resentment of social coercion and an awareness that one was oneself a product of these coercive social structures, making a locus of resistance elusive, other than interstitially.

Dawson's protagonists are blighted by this deadlock as they struggle to construct and negotiate an identity. This is the context in which Goffman contends that 'sustained rejection of a total institution often requires sustained orientation to its formal organization, and hence, paradoxically, a deep [...] involvement in the establishment.'[14] While Dawson's protagonists seldom desire or successfully feign involvement, ostensible adaptation is sometimes embraced as a prerequisite for long-term survival. Dawson presents institutions and society as a whole as enterprises for inducing docility and promoting homogeneity. Out-and-out rejection is portrayed as inadvisable, as it tends to intensify surveillance and control. Her novels imply that since traditional forms of revolt tend to be counter-productive, preferable is a schema of resistance based on interstitial negotiation, as much between the clamouring voices within the subject's consciousness as with the actual forces of attrition.

Dawson's fiction is an exploration of individual struggle, where a greater threat to autonomy than literal assault is the imposition of alien ideas, which come to

be experienced as subjective and spontaneously arising. Anticipating Foucault, Whitehead argues that intercourse between individuals and social groups takes either the form of force or of persuasion.[15] Yet all too often persuasion exposes consent as a myth, since force is waiting in the wings lest persuasion should fail. The novelist Janet Frame's contention that we are 'caged within ourselves, and custom has turned the key'[16] encapsulates this preoccupation. However, Dawson's fiction exposes the tension between the deep-programmed machinery within each social subject and the semi-conscious areas inaccessible to it, which dimly discern the strategies employed deny their existence. Her novels contextualize "mental illness" by demonstrating how alien ideas imposed by "consensus society" are converted in the mind of the resistant subject from metaphorical invasions into the literalized "external" voices cited by psychiatry as a schizophrenic symptom.

Dawson's concerns are illuminated by the contemporaneous theories of Foucault and Laing, Foucault excavating the construct of power, and Laing demystifying the abuses by whose means the group consolidates itself. Foucault's trans-disciplinary analysis of the evolution of methods of constraint, the scapegoating of the marginalized and the invalidation of dissent reveals how once overt techniques have refined and consolidated themselves. He shows how strategies of normalization have developed syncretically from punishment meted out by "the authorities," through democratized control, to internalized self-constraint, this last being the current manifestation of the methods from which it traces its descent. However, each "stage" can at any moment be reactivated.

---

[14] Goffman, E., *Asylums* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 62
[15] Whitehead, A. N., *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1961), p. 83
[16] Frame, J., *Faces in the Water* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1980), p. 183

Dawson's *The Ha-Ha*, set in a psychiatric hospital, paves the way for her later fiction in illustrating how this phenomenon works. Significantly, however, psychiatry steps in only when society, and specifically the family, are exposed as having failed to induce the protagonist to play her prescribed rôle "of her own accord." Dawson thus implies that those who fall prey to psychiatric normalization are those who are identified as having failed to internalize the social codes instilled by other institutions, beginning with the family which she portrays as their microcosm and archetype. Since psychiatric measures are atavistic methods of control, the centrality of surveillance and punishment, euphemistically referred to as "care" and "treatment," is not denied, as it is within the social in its generality, but is cited as a prerequisite for "cure." Just as war is politics pursued by other means, psychiatric normalization is presented as social normalization administered through medically-sanctioned channels.

As Dawson, Laing and Foucault show, the psychiatric discourse is characterized by the circular arguments it invokes to justify itself and the self-fulfilling prophecies it unleashes. As a factory for reformulating anyone resistant to conventional means of promoting homogeneity, its purpose is confused with the justification for its purpose. Despite case conferences, sustained observation and E.C.T., lobotomy and the involuntary administration of psychiatric drugs, any complaint of being talked about, spied upon or under attack is dismissed as a paranoid delusion. Negotiation is thus shown to be crucial, although, as Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* comes to realize, the "sense of self" required as its basis is precisely what institutions seek to dismantle and reconstruct.

Foucault's descriptive texts present a range of techniques of scapegoating, constraint and social control, and allude to the way in which these encapsulate general societal trends. The authorial perspective, though elusive, can be inferred from the

choice of subject matter for, like Laing and Dawson, he focuses on the "limit experiences" of the deviant, the peripheral and the oppressed. In his own words, 'Madness, death, sexuality, crime: these are the things that attract my attention most.'[17] While the individual is absent, except as a battleground where social pressures converge, he is, by implication, present throughout. Dawson's fiction, contextually linked to Foucauldian concerns, explores the effects of these social pressures and the tensions that arise between the preservation of autonomy and the preservation of moral integrity. Although in her early novels the negotiation of these tensions is only indirectly portrayed as an ethical imperative and more as a matter of survival, her later novels demonstrate that the construction of an authentic "self" is the only valid starting point for broaching questions of ethics.

As Laing shows theoretically and as Dawson explores through fiction, the tyranny of the majority, experienced as an internalized consensus, seeks to preserve the group, as concept and actuality, by pre-emptively silencing dissent. As Frame's protagonist puts it in *Faces in the Water*, 'Now that my personality had been condemned, like a slum dwelling, the planners were at work.'[18] Although the reference is to lobotomy, to paraphrase Laing this is only required if social lobotomy should fail.[19] Just as to pave the way for gentrification, local identities must first be erased, in order for the individual to be normalized, his or her experience must first be destroyed, a parallel explored in Dawson's fiction of the 1970s. However, as Primo Levi argues, 'in order for the wheel to turn, for life to be lived, impurities are needed, [...] impurities in the soil, too, [...] if it is to be fertile.'[20] His observation that Fascism

---

[17] *Remarks on Marx*, pp. 99-100
[18] Frame, p. 216
[19] Laing, R. D., *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 91
[20] Levi, P., *The Periodic Table*, trans. by R. Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1997), p. 34

recoils from and seeks to annihilate these casts it not as a deviation from the social, but as its defining current and mobilizing force.

Jean Rhys, in her short story "Outside the Machine," articulates the same phenomenon. 'Because she was outside the machine they might come along at any time with a pair of huge iron tongs and pick her up and put her on the rubbish heap, and there she would lie and rot. "Useless this one," they would say, and throw her away before she could explain.'[21] The iron tongs represent not only psychiatric authorization for scalpels to invade dissenting brains, they symbolize the same ritual enacted metaphorically by the social. This phenomenon illuminates Dawson's contention that 'the word "success" has a terrible ring these days. Like "adapt."'[22]

The theme of madness, that surfaces throughout Dawson's fiction, is one that invites a range of readings. In one sense, as discussed, it is a label imposed to justify psychiatric attempts to "socialize" the "anti-social" subject by more overt means than would be tolerable to the "liberal" currents that underlie society as a whole. Yet while the imposition of such a label, or currently its myriad sub-categories, is far from synonymous with the existence of the symptoms it purports to signify, the label's application affects the experience of anyone who might be thus defined. On the one hand, as Dawson demonstrates, psychiatrists cast as "symptoms" any authentic response to the "patient-psychiatric situation," the continuation of whose dynamic is thereby conveniently ensured. In this sense, attempts at resistance are futile, since even those who remain aloof from the charade are deemed "withdrawn" and hence potentially psychotic. Yet on the other hand, this labelling process produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. The recognition that the psychiatric hospital is "the end of the

---

[21] Rhys, J., *Tigers are Better-Looking* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 82
[22] Dawson, J., *Hospital Wedding Stories* (London: Quartet Books, 1978), p. 104

line," and psychiatry a password for forceful applications of the normalizing drive, is likely to produce the symptoms of "madness."

Like Dawson and Foucault, Laing demonstrates that the tyranny of the group exerts just as constraining an effect on the majority as it does on their chosen scapegoats. As Sartre argues, exposing the roots of estrangement, 'giving orders and obeying them are one and the same thing. Even the most authoritarian gives orders in someone else's name.'[23] While sadism may emerge in members of the group, since this drive is activated to ease the enactment of the tasks they have to perform to protect their membership it is a function and not a motivation of the dynamic. Nonetheless, Dawson's protagonists, identified as contravening the codes of the majority, experience the incursions of the normalizing drive as targeting them as individuals rather than as anonymous inauthentically functioning cogs impeding the efficiency of the machine. Dawson's fiction explores how the disparity between the purported benevolence of social and psychiatric normalization and the brutality, whether psychological or physical, of its effects intensifies the mystification required for dissenters to see their proposed conversion not only as beneficial but as externalizing their own unrealized desires. If this process is dimly recognized as a modern form of ritual combining scapegoating and sacrifice, masquerading as selflessness as the group attempts to resubsume one of its errant units, the resulting sense of disorientation can replicate the symptoms of "madness."

Josephine's experience in *The Ha-Ha* gives a fascinating insight into the defensive psychic reflexes that avert full realization of the nature of this dynamic. Throughout the novel she veers between perceiving herself as defective and ungrateful, and discerning the mechanics of this engineered internalization. The latter

state, where her behaviour betrays her awareness of the attempts of "society," as represented by the hospital staff, to induce docility in her and to sustain it in themselves, is interpreted as evidence of an upsurge in her illness. The former, however, where she doubts her own judgement and wonders whether she oughtn't to comply, is lauded as a step towards being "cured." This theme, explored from different perspectives and developed in different spheres, characterizes Dawson's fiction which, over time, begins to allude to interstitial ways of breaking the deadlock of this dilemma.

Foucault and the "anti-psychiatrists," notably Szasz and Laing, proceed from the premise that the *status quo* can be more easily maintained if each social subject can be incited to identify with it than if it is experienced as having been externally imposed. This phenomenon is inferentially evident in Foucault's work, while Szasz and Laing deconstruct psychiatry to expose the same essential tendency. Dawson's fiction, whose concerns are contextualized and illuminated by these contemporaneous theorists, presents a continuum of applications of the normalizing drive against which the individual struggles to negotiate an authentic and autonomous "sense of self."

In his introduction to *The Mirror Maker*, Levi issues the caveat that he should by no means be regarded as a prophet. 'I'm a normal man [...] who fell into a maelstrom and got out of it more by luck than virtue, and who from that time on has preserved a certain curiosity about maelstroms large and small, metaphorical and actual.'[24] Although the concentration camp experience is obviously distinct from the psychiatric one, Dawson's writing also engages with maelstroms, and their resonance on the continuum of the microcosm and macrocosm. Her fiction of the sixties and

---

[23] Sartre, J.-P., *Words*, trans. by Irene Clephane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 16
[24] Levi, P., *The Mirror Maker*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Minerva, 1989), pp. 3-4

seventies increasingly focuses on the social and political context of individual struggle. While in *Fowler's Snare* (1962) Joanna is subsumed by the *status quo*, Dickie in *The Cold Country* (1965) discerns intimations of authentic resistance amidst the mutually consolidating forces of "class," the psychiatric machine, "Civil Defence" and "urban planning," all of which manifest the underlying paradigm of power. Further developing all these themes, *Strawberry Boy* (1976) engages with the question of "race" and reveals the necessity of micropolitical resistance, informed by an interstitial perspective. *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* (1979) fuses these preoccupations and overlays memories, vicarious and actual, of the Spanish Civil War, the two World Wars and the war in Vietnam with the complexities of the struggle of C.N.D. The proliferation of political abuses intensifies the need for an interstitial vantage point, in this case represented by music, symbolic of Will's potential transcendence of everything enacted in his name. Dawson implies this triumph to be the only valid point of departure for genuine political engagement. The juxtaposition and overlap of these two goals presents them as so mutually sustaining that neither can be realized in the absence of a commitment to the other.

Dawson's novels after the seventies rework these concerns. *The Upstairs People* (1988) engages with the brutalizing effects of the family, itself brutalized by the effects of war, while *Judasland* (1989) addresses the way in which race and class, and the concept of heredity in general, manifest the normalizing drive. The exclusion of scapegoats is shown to have evolved into the more insidious pressure to convert, galvanized in the same way as the psychiatric pressure to submit to the contentious reward of being "cured." In other words, for Dawson individual freedom is a prerequisite for an ethical social world.

Her fiction is informed by Foucault's contention that since we inhabit a micropolitical society, the individual must invest in the manufacture of micropolitical resistance (this being the only point of departure practically or morally valid for the transformation of the social). Collective action devoid of individual awareness can only produce new modes of constraint, which structurally replicate the old. As Foucault argues,

> For reasons that essentially pertain to my political choice, in the widest sense of the term, I absolutely will not play the part of one who prescribes solutions. I hold that the role of the intellectual today is not that of establishing laws or proposing solutions or prophesying, since by doing that one can only contribute to the functioning of a determinate situation of power that to my mind must be criticized.[25]

Since, like Laing and Dawson, he focuses on demystifying conventional patterns of thought, he rejects the rôle of the 'expert' who, as Chomsky puts it, is, in practice, simply 'the loyal and useful servant of those who hold the reins of power.'[26]

In referring to those who think in different ways, rather than who necessarily think different things, Rosa Luxemburg's definition of freedom as first and foremost the freedom for those who think in different ways emphasizes the form of thought rather than its content. Dawson's novels, like Foucault's philosophy, share this perspective as they demystify accepted modes of thought by engaging with their normalizing effects. Throughout her fiction of the sixties and seventies, her protagonists move from trying to preserve their ways of thinking as an end in itself to seeking interstitially to generate and activate a politicized collective consciousness.

---

[25] *Remarks on Marx*, p. 157
[26] *Deterring Democracy*, p. 253

The Ha-Ha

Madness, Constraint and Normalizing Power

The Ha-Ha traces Josephine's attempts to preserve her experience from the incursions of the normalizing drive as manifested first by her mother, then by the social world of Oxford University and finally by "the hospital" (the psychiatric institution which literalizes the implied coercion that underpins the normalizing discourse). "Madness" is portrayed not only as a label imposed to invalidate dissent, a scapegoating strategy designed to reassure and consolidate the group, but also as an attempt at resistance through counter-mystification, intelligible in the context of the self-fulfilling prophecy of the untenable position produced by the label's imposition. Josephine gradually comes to realize that since overt attempts at resistance to ontological annihilation merely entangle her further in operations of normalizing power, only through the development of an interstitial perspective can her experience be authentically preserved. This perspective is symbolized by the ha-ha of the title, which lies between "the hospital," symbolic of coercion, and the discourse of the social continuum whose strategies it makes manifest.

The Ha-Ha (1961), the first of Jennifer Dawson's novels, seeks to render contextually intelligible the phenomenon reductively referred to as "madness." Attuned to the concerns of the times, it responds to the *demands* of the times and implicitly protests against them. This work of fiction, viewed retrospectively, augurs the preoccupations that would later be seen to characterize the decade.

Significantly, the interplay of forces that produced the social phenomenon known as "the sixties" created a new perspective from which the idea of "madness" could be explored. The shift towards an anti-authoritarian stance provided a conceptual canvas upon which the theme of madness could be depicted, no longer as something self-referential, but instead as a manifestation of stifled defiance. The experience of breakdown, as a code for inner conflict, began to be seen as a synecdoche for the crisis of the relationship of the subject to the wider social world.

Like many of her contemporaries, in the wake of the Holocaust and under the shadow of the Bomb, Dawson evokes a sense of individual displacement resulting from a crisis in attitudes to authority, in particular to the way in which authority annexes "reason" to justify repression and coercion. In many of the novels of the sixties, breakdown is presented as an attempt to shatter what Doris Lessing calls 'the patterns that dominate our thinking.'[1] Lessing refers to the sixties as 'a dangerous decade [that left] a great many casualties' behind.[2] Yet this was also a productive decade where many novelists sought to map the radical shift in perspective that was a diagnostic of the times.

Janet Frame's *Faces In The Water*, published in the same year as *The Ha-Ha*, was inspired by the author's experience of eight years in a psychiatric institution,

---

[1] Lessing, D., *Unexamined Mental Attitudes Left Behind By Communism*, 1992, at http://lessing.redmood.com/unexamined.html

[2] Quoted in Raskin, J., *The Progressive Interview*, 1999, at http://lessing.redmood.com/theprogressive.html

undergoing electroconvulsive therapy. In her novel, Frame defines this "treatment" as 'the new and fashionable means of quieting people and making them realise that orders are to be obeyed [...] without anyone protesting and faces are made to be fixed into smiles and weeping is a crime.'[3] These assaults are interpreted by Frame as techniques of pacification and homogenization, designed to 'push into line the wandering herd,'[4] whose main crime seems to be their tendency to 'construe as miracle the hieroglyphic commonplace.'[5] This enforcement of unanimity, a defining theme of Dawson's fiction, is encapsulated in the proud announcement of the head of the biocybernetics department in Solzhenitsyn's *Candle In The Wind*, first published the year before *The Ha-Ha*. ' "We'll give her real granite-like mental health. We'll transform her nervous system into a nondeviating vector."'[6] However, implicitly criticizing Lessing's use of "madness" as a metaphor for "breakthrough," Frame, like Dawson, avoids romanticizing it, and instead perceives it, as Laing does, as a mode of revolt against the tyranny of social codes.

This tendency to offer an oblique critique of the social is a direct response to the nature of the times, distinguishing the concerns of these novels from the way in which their predecessors tended to portray the theme of breakdown. For example, Hannah Green's *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* (1949) focuses on a specific family, rather than on a version of the *entity* The Family, as the chief oppressive force in precipitating or catalysing breakdown. Furthermore, the physical rather than ontological threat posed in the novel is embodied by individuals who, although in the pay of the state, never fully conceptually represent it. The struggles of Green's

---

3 *Faces In The* Water, p. 15
4 *Faces In The Water*, p. 56
5 *Faces In The Water*, p. 251
6 Solzhenitsyn, A., *Candle In The Wind*, trans. by Keith Armes (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 85

protagonist are portrayed primarily as inter-subjective ones, rather than as a battle to preserve herself from modes of behaviour explicitly enforced by "the social." For example, we learn that

> Hobbs was frightened of the craziness he saw around him because it was an extension of something inside himself. He wanted people to be crazier and more bizarre than they really were so that he could see the line which separated him [...] from the full-bloomed exploded madness of the patients.[7]

In other words, his semi-conscious misreading of his patients stems not from an *imposed* desire to dominate and constrain them, but simply from his own ontological unease. As Frame argues, 'much of living is an attempt to preserve oneself by annexing and occupying others,'[8] an assertion which presages Laing's explorations of the contextual intelligibility of the attitudes underlying modes of interaction.

Frame's *Faces In The Water* expands this theme of the fear "the sane" harbour of "the mad" by providing a critique of the sublimation of this fear into the socially sanctioned urge to banish, punish and prey upon them, leaving them no choice but to retreat into a self-referential world. In other words, this novel analyses the ways in which individual fears are validated and thus empowered by the social. Labelling someone "mad" is shown to have become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and hence a political event. As Goffman argues in his study of the impact of institutions on the individual, 'ethical neutrality is [...] difficult to sustain in psychiatry, because the patient's disorder is intrinsically related to his acting in a way that causes offence to witnesses.'[9]

Published ten years after *The Ha-Ha,* Lessing's *Briefing For A Descent Into Hell* [10] presents breakdown as explicitly linked to the insanity of war. Rather than

---

[7] Green, H., *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986), p. 62
[8] *Faces in the Water*, p. 217
[9] Goffman, p. 318
[10] Lessing, D., *Briefing For A Descent Into Hell* (London: Harper Collins, 1994)

being portrayed as individuals beset by individual fears, the doctors in this novel are society's henchmen, seeking to deflect the threat of madness, not on their own account, but to consolidate the homogeneity of the social. Lessing contends that 'in all our minds are patterns which we do not examine that govern our behaviour.'[11] Intrigued by the limits of sanity, she links the theme of breakdown to an individual sense of dissociation, stemming in part, and on an often subliminal level, from 'a profound contempt for the incompetence of the government.'[12]

These concerns are echoed less subtly in David Mercer's *In Two Minds* (1967), where Kate, diagnosed as schizophrenic, is baffled by the socially dictated criteria for what constitutes "acceptability," a bewilderment encapsulated in the analogy that follows.

> There's a boy I knew [...] he's really brutal and violent. He bashed an old man at a garage with a bit of pipe to get into the till. If he'd killed somebody [...]in the army during the war - well, he'd be a bloody hero, wouldn't he? [...] What exactly is the difference? People end up dead either way. I don't understand.[13]

This play, inspired by the same Laingian outlook that informs Dawson's fiction, explores the interconnected manifestations of the tyranny exerted by the mainstream world, as well as the resistance to this tyranny. By the 1960s, the majority view, as refracted through the novelistic lens, had largely usurped the rôle of the state as the origin of a spectrum of repressive forces, of which the psychiatric is simply an overt manifestation.

1960s novels of breakdown combine to form an interstitial site which is a starting point for an inferred critique of all these totalizing forces. As Lessing notes, 'deep in the human mind is the need to order, control, set bounds. Art, the arts in

---

[11] From *Unexamined Mental Attitudes Left Behind By Communism*

[12] Quoted by de Bertodano, H., *Life Is Stronger Than Fiction*, 1996, at http://www.edmontonjournal.com/sens/0411two.html

general, are always unpredictable, maverick, and tend at their best to be uncomfortable.'[14] As early as 1947, Mary Jane Ward's *The Snake Pit*, a seminal depiction of breakdown, argues that literature's potential for subversion is a more effective means than breakdown itself of posing fundamental questions about the individual's place in the wider social world. Here, the first intimations of the protagonist's recovery are symbolized by a resurgence of her interest in writing. 'For some weeks now she had been unable to think of herself as a part of Juniper Hill. The Observer had come back and a novel was being formed.'[15] While fiction of this nature springs from a "splitting" not dissimilar from that at the source of breakdown, the vital distinction is that fiction allows experience to be exorcized and reclaimed. In the act of writing, experience is sublimated and controlled by the subject, whereas breakdown places the subject at the mercy of experience. The sense of severance and estrangement from language, a common "symptom," or diagnostic, of breakdown, can be transformed when filtered through the retrospective gauze of narrative. In fact, Lessing argues that 'that sequence of words, "I've got to use words," is a definition of all literature, seen from a different perspective.'[16] Subsequent novels of the sixties tend to move away from the reflex withdrawal of breakdown, through which the "survival" of the subject can only ever be on alien terms. Instead they illuminate the nature of repression and coercion, while identifying modes of negotiation from which a critique of the social can be inferred.

Seymour Krim, for example, describes the experience of "breakdown" as follows.

---

[13] Mercer, D., *In Two Minds* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967), p. 72
[14] From *Unexamined Mental Attitudes Left Behind By Communism*
[15] Ward, M. J., *The Snake Pit* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1947), p. 239
[16] *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, p. 105

> In my own exhibitionist and self-dramatizing way, when I flipped, I was nevertheless instinctively rebelling against a fact which I think is objectively true in our society and time: and that is the lack of alignment between an immense inner world and an outer one which has not yet legalized, or officially recognized, the forms that can tolerate the flood of communication from the mind to the stage of action.[17]

All these works of fiction are linked by the way in which they seek both to bridge and to call into question the nature of the gulf that separates these two ostensibly contradictory worlds.

Another characteristic shared by these novels of breakdown is their refusal to view madness in an idealized way, as a liberating alternative view of the world. Ward, in fact, had parodied such counter-productive romanticization when her protagonist recalls her own deluded views of breakdown, exemplified by the fact that her fictional hero, 'brokendown, was a far more attractive person than he had been before.'[18] In its evocation of cumulative suffering, *The Snake Pit* seeks to dispel this common misconception. Significantly too, the autobiographical undertones of these novels help to preserve them from salacious voyeurism. Yet far from being simply a litany of woes, these works of fiction seek to explore what madness actually means. Although she forgets her own identity, the one conviction that Virginia in *The Snake Pit* retains is that 'fiction can be serious'[19] and thus can perform a serious function.

The experience of breakdown, as expressed through fiction, is acutely relevant to the nature of the times, which themselves reveal intimations of the origins of breakdown. Kundera cites the novel as 'incompatible with the totalitarian universe,' for 'Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning,' and hence cannot

---

[17] Krim, S., "The Insanity Bit," in *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* (New York: Excelsior Press, 1961), cited in Szasz, T. (ed.), *The Age of Madness* (New York & London: Jason Aronson, 1974), p. 292

[18] *The Snake Pit*, p. 66

[19] *The Snake Pit*, p. 115

accommodate 'the *spirit of the novel*.'[20] Fictionalized *accounts* of breakdown provide a unique perspective on the factors through whose synergistic impact breakdown can be triggered or produced, without being compromised by the *withdrawal* from these factors which characterizes breakdown itself.

Dramatizing David Caute's assertion that 'literature should not be a sedative, but an irritant, a catalyst,'[21] these writers retrospectively counteract the stagnation of psychological collapse with an emphasis on dialogue and the search for the interstitial. Bearing out E. L. Doctorow's contention that 'there is no fiction or nonfiction as we commonly understand the distinction. There is only narrative,'[22] these "narratives of breakdown" dissolve this artificial division. Bearing out Paul Fussell's assertion that anything 'processed by memory is fiction,'[23] these novels sublimate first-hand experience, revealing the potential for spaces within the social impervious to normalizing forces.

---

[20] Kundera, M., *The Art of the Novel* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1988), pp. 13-14

[21] Introduction to Sartre, J.-P., *What is Literature*, trans. by B. Frechtman (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1978), p. x

[22] Doctorow, E. L., *Poets and Presidents. Selected Essays 1977-1992* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1994), p. 163

[23] Fussell, P., *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 205

"Madness" As An Attempt To Resist Normalization

Laing and Cooper argue that 'in an alienated society, freedom can only be revealed first in alienated form: as the realization of freedom develops it can no longer deny itself. Freedom is impossible but, once realized, freedom is realized to be necessary.'[24] Arguably, the very existence of "fiction of breakdown" is, by definition, evidence of breakthrough, as its very form replaces the alienated experience of "madness" with a striving after freedom that rejects this kind of autism and rests on, and is realized through, a renewed sense of connection with the world. For example, Szasz defines the "mental patient" as someone who

> fails, or refuses, to assume a legitimate social role. This is not permitted [...]. A person unclassified is unpredictable [...] and hence a threat [...]. This is why people who choose this path to personal freedom pay dearly for it: although they succeed in breaking out of their particular cells, they do not remain long at liberty. They are immediately recaptured, first symbolically, by being classified as mentally ill; and then physically, by being brought to the psychiatrist for processing into formal psychiatric identities and for psychiatric detention.[25]

Only in fiction is the adoption of an unorthodox subject position not viewed as a threat. Novelists are thus not subject to the psychiatric Procrustean bed that would seek to normalize them were they to live (as, ironically, so many of them *have* done) the experience sublimated into a novel.

This phenomenon underlies Dawson's *The Ha-Ha*, which traces the process by which Josephine, the protagonist, slips from the mainstream world of Oxford University to the peripheral world of a mental institution. Here she experiences the conflict, and subsequent uneasy alliance, between on the one hand "survival" and on the other the preservation of her own autonomous perspective.

---

[24] Laing, R. D. & D. Cooper, *Reason and Violence. A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy 1950-1960* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1971), p. 133

[25] Szasz, T., *Ideology and Insanity. Essays on the psychiatric dehumanization of man* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973), p. 210

Her mother's death, which signifies the removal of the constraints of social codes, does not so much *precipitate* her collapse, as make manifest the "symptoms" that existed all along. These symptoms symbolize an authentic response, from which can be inferred a divergence from conventional formulations of experience. Finally, an ultimately unsustainable interlude with a fellow patient reveals to Josephine what hospital methods could not: that the world is there to be lived in, not (or not only) to be fled from, and therefore that negotiation and dialogue must replace the withdrawal into self-referentiality.

The novel explores Josephine's struggle to define herself against, and within, the tenets of the normalizing methods of the social which, although they permeate the content of the text, are seldom explicitly referred to. Instead, their presence can be inferred from the range of responses they evoke in Josephine, who must try to break their deadlock, and find a way of mapping a path between negotiation and resistance.

As Foucault has shown, the proliferating axes of normalization represent a stage in the evolution of power from its original sovereign and monolithic beam to something generative rather than repressive. However, the pace at which normalization techniques syncretically update themselves varies from one sphere to the next. Thus it is not necessarily the case that the advent of the latest method automatically signals the demise of its predecessor.

In the hospital in *The Ha-Ha*, the interplay of force and power, where force is largely dominant, is symptomatic of a situation that has, in general, been superseded by more insidious methods in contemporary Western society. Power's manifestations in the micropolitical age tend to be less overt, and hence harder to identify, as those on whom they are exercised, and who function simultaneously as their mode of transmission, reproduce, voluntarily, micropolitical methods of control. Had they not

been "converted," they too would no doubt find themselves in a hospital similar to the one in which Josephine is held for most of the novel.

Friedenberg casts light on the internalization of constraint in his contention that, since 'mystification and manipulation are the *raisons d'être* of institutions, their members learn, for the sake of their membership, to mystify and manipulate *themselves* if there is nobody available from management to do it for them.'[26] As Foucault demonstrates, the panopticization of the social (the reduction of the social to a network of complicitous, intersecting gazes) draws everything under the auspices of the institutional dynamic.

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's anxieties about the outside world stem from the fact that, situated within it, rather than in one of its exclusion zones, she loses sight of the structures by which she feels oppressed. Indeed, a diagnostic of the social is its denial of the existence of oppression, and its insistence that the "delusion" of being oppressed implicitly denotes mental illness.

Josephine's bewilderment at the maze of social codes is conveyed when she wonders 'what words were *the words*, the things that carried, the words that counted, and qualified you for the world of other people.'[27] Even with Alasdair, the character with whom she feels a tenuous sense of kinship, the moments of connection are only short-lived because, as she herself puts it, '"My eyes are always turned in the wrong direction. My thoughts are always on the wrong things."'[28] Existence is experienced as an ontological battleground, where her ignorance of the rules is a handicap.

Dialogue, or what passes for it, seems a contest to impose existential domination, so that 'the reply would come "pat" before I even had time in my mind's

---

[26] Friedenberg, E., *Laing* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1975), p. 94
[27] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 95
[28] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 101

eye to string the racket so that the ball did not slip straight through the frame.'[29] Words are experienced as moves in a game which is alien to her, and as missiles against which she feels unequipped to defend herself. Hence she feels continually under threat from alien meanings, that seek to displace her from the centre of herself.

Similar intimations lead Mercer's Kate to equate herself to 'a piece of machinery. All the bits whirring and ticking, but it's not me. It's a *thing*. And I'm outside this machine. Only the "I" that's outside, it's not a person either. Sometimes I think I'm operated by remote control.'[30] In the same way, Virginia in *The Snake Pit* recalls her conviction that 'she was not a free agent.' [31] A superficial reading of mental illness could thus define it symbolically as a revolt against imposed external control. However, this is a rhetorical distortion; more to the point, revolt is invalidated by the would-be controllers by being defined as a symptom of disease, which is what Foucault meant when he defined such a diagnosis as 'the false punishment of a false solution.'[32] Moreover, as the Foucauldian critic Judith Butler contends, 'in order to exercise and elaborate its own power, a regulatory regime will generate the very object it seeks to control.'[33] In other words, unruly forces are constructed as a discursive ruse to justify the exercise of power, so that tyranny and rebellion call each other forth. Power, in its guise as the normalizing drive, generates a "reality," which can then be cited as evidence for the need for an increasingly repressive social climate.

The rise of psychiatry as a discipline has been a significant socio-political event, since the pathologization of madness carries in its wake the assumption that society, as embodied by the psychiatrist, has a moral duty to see that its host is

---

[29] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 10
[30] *In Two Minds*, p. 68
[31] *The Snake Pit*, p. 33
[32] Foucault, M., *Madness & Civilization*, trans. by Howard, R. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), p. 33

"cured." This is the context in which Cooper attributes Foucault's lack of popularity with psychiatrists to his focus on 'the shadows of power that sustained the bright light of medical truth.' For 'if madness was not simply mental illness, but a judgement of power of one mind over another, the pristene vocation of these medical practitioners would be fatally undermined.'[34]

The ideas of R. D. Laing, the influence of which Dawson has acknowledged,[35] centre around the conviction that the imposition of the category mental illness can be used as a political tool, wielded to invalidate dissent. Ironically, dissent must presumably also be held to be a construct by those who impose the diagnosis, in the light of the denial that the totalizing drive exists. To question whether the category "mental illness" is valid is not to question the existence of the "symptoms" attributed to it. It is rather to suggest that these symptoms are an oblique *response* to coercion, rather than the other way around, as is generally assumed.

In this context, Friedenberg contends that the behaviour of mental patients is a last ditch attempt to preserve their experience and the ways in which they represent it, both to themselves and to others. In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's behaviour results from her bafflement at people's strategies of veiling their perplexity whenever she attempts a contribution to their chatter. For example, when she tries to recount the intensity of experiencing the "spirit of place" by a disused canal, the response, or lack of it, seems to annihilate what happened. '"How sinister," shuddered Alison. Her husband shifted his feet and looked at her lovingly.'[36]

---

[33] Butler, J., "Sexual Inversions," in S. J. Hekman (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Foucault* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 64

[34] Cooper, .B., *Michel Foucault. An Introduction to the Study of his Thought* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981), p. 13

[35] Correspondence and conversations with Jennifer Dawson, 1998

[36] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 80

This theme of the invocation of clichés as a tool of invalidation employed by the *status quo* is one that resurfaces throughout Dawson's fiction, on both the microcosmic and the macrocosmic level. Ontologically eclipsed by these rejoinders, Josephine, having lost the will to play the game, loses the ability to do so.

Significantly, in the light of Foucault's contention that power achieves its effects by inciting internalization of the notion of consensus, Josephine partially internalizes the attitudes she invokes. As she recalls, 'I saw that I would never transform my pink jumper and heavy skirt. They were dragging me down.'[37] In vain, she tries to convey the surreal juxtapositions brought into focus by her cataloguing job:

> On the one side, there are the stars and snow, and love, only that's not easy; and death, but that is simpler. And then on the other side there are houses like this one, perched up in the sky, with pockets of electricity and water and music, and pipes and tubes running down into the earth, and everyone eating savouries and dancing and talking about the best way of life, and the way to deal with Rhodesian snakes, all as though nothing had happened. And really it is... unbelievable, it is... [...] the word could not be found.[38]

Although this is not intentional counter-mystification, the timing and positioning of Josephine's increasingly unexpected remarks, which are looked at increasingly askance, suggest *unconscious* counter-mystification.

Friedenberg locates the chief motivation for the behaviour seen to denote schizophrenia as the need for "schizophrenics" 'to confuse their assailants by producing a counter-mystification sufficiently obscure to throw their avid parents and guardians off the track that led to their soul, subtly enough to avoid being interpreted, and punished.'[39] In the same way that the guardians deny their compulsive surveillance, the guarded also implicitly deny their urge to elude and outwit this

---

[37] *The Ha-Ha* p. 87
[38] *The Ha-Ha* p. 87
[39] Friedenberg, p. 37

surveillance. However, since the initial operation is denied, accusations of the counter-operation are obviously hard for the guardians to formulate.

Nancy Fraser, a Foucauldian critic, argues that the transition from the pre-micropolitical to the micropolitical age is defined not by

> the abolition of domination, but rather, [by] the replacement of premodern forms of domination with new, quintessentially modern ones [...].Talk of rights and the inviolability of the person is of no use when the enemy is not the despot but the psychiatric social worker.[40]

However, while syncretically updated normalization techniques can be seen to define the social in its generality, the methods used in the hospital (identifiable operations of force, rather than the anonymous ones of power) resurrect premodern methods (although these are justified by the superficial rhetoric of benevolence).

This phenomenon is dramatized in *The Ha-Ha* when Josephine's attempts to convey her experience at the student party are inhibited by the pressure to conform to social codes while, in the hospital, her efforts to transcribe her thoughts are threatened by enforced "treatment" with E.C.T. and medically sanctioned drugs. Not only does the hospital manifest the overt application of force, but the enemy, or enemies, by whom this force is directly applied, are visible, and hence identifiable. However, on one level at least, Josephine is relieved to be able to identify the instruments of her oppression, since their existence is proof that her feelings of persecution are justified. It is clearly an objective fact, not merely paranoia, that incites her to perceive her experience as subject to assault when she finds herself held down and drugged against her will.

A similar preference is expressed in Jean Rhys's short story, "A Solid House," where the overt vandalism of subjective experience is portrayed as preferable to the subtle destruction of the *experience* of experience.

> He [the tobacconist] always refused women customers when there was a shortage. [...] She wondered what the old beast would say if he knew that she rather liked him. His open hatred and contempt were a relief from the secret hatreds that hissed from between the lines of newspapers or the covers of books, or peeped from sly smiling eyes.[41]

Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* sustains less psychic damage as a result of the hospital's methods than she does from the social codes that operate beyond its walls.

Her reaction is illuminated by reference to those of the "survivors" of violence interviewed by MacCannell and MacCannell, which lead the interviewers to conclude that 'the evident cruel intention of the torturer may actually become a component of the victim's ability to recover. In the realm of intra- and inter-subjective violence a word or a "look" can do more lasting harm than physical injury.'[42] Although their field of study is, specifically, the effects of domestic violence and child abuse, their point is a pertinent one. If the source of violence cannot be located, if the assailant's motives are obscure or if the form that the violence takes resists articulation, its effects will be particularly destructive. This is because it invades not only the subject's experience, but the experience of this experience, and thus pre-emptively blocks the path to any potential locus of resistance.

Kirsner, a Laingian critic, contends that 'the most "normal" are the most mystified,'[43] and herein lies the point. The patient's incentive to submit to mystification is the automatic reward of the coveted label "normal." Those already "normal" are obviously not seen to be in need of the procedures of normalization, so submission guarantees the cessation of the normalizing process. On the other hand, to betray an awareness that a game is being played is to drastically compromise one's

---

[40] Hekman, pp. 25-6

[41] *Tigers Are Better Looking*, p. 112

[42] 'Violence, Power and Pleasure' by MacCannell, D. & J. F. MacCannell in Ramazanoglu, C., ed., *Up Against Foucault* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 207

[43] Kirsner, D., *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre & R. D. Laing* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976), p. 140

position. Displaying one's cards in such a way would decree one's defeat inevitable since normalization strategies would simply be intensified.

This tendency, of whose existence Josephine becomes aware in *The Ha-Ha*, was illuminated by Laing and Esterson who interviewed schizophrenics and their "schizophrenogenic" families to explore the possibility of the contextual intelligibility of symptoms labelled schizophrenic. When asked 'Do you feel you have to agree with what most of the people round you believe?' "Ruth" responds with the world-weary words, 'Well, if I don't I usually land up in hospital.'[44] Like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, her resistance to mystification is precisely what initially activated the machinery that led to her acquisition of the label schizophrenic.

---

[44] Laing, R. D., & Esterson, A., *Sanity, Madness and the Family. An investigation into the "forgotten illness" - schizophrenia* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 175

In *The Age of Reason*, Sartre defines the only true choice as that between being nothing at all or being an impersonation of what one is. Josephine's challenge is to negotiate a route between the Scylla and the Charybdis of these two modes of surrender, a challenge which, as shall be seen, can only be met in the light of the breakthrough that can come in the wake of breakdown. While Dawson's portrayal of characters, situations and events inferentially constitutes a denial of this assumption, the way her novels are structured betrays her ambivalence. She emphasizes that while breakdown *can* lead to breakthrough, this transition is by no means a foregone conclusion. Laing observes that:

> If anyone in a family begins to realize he is [...] a puppet, he will be wise to exercise the greatest precautions as to whom he imparts this information to. It is not 'normal' to realize such things. There are a number of psychiatric names, and a variety of treatments for such realizations.[45]

Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* makes the mistake of failing to exercise these recommended precautions, and is stunned by the supremacy of puppetry over the world of unmediated experience it seeks to displace. The hospital is presented as promoting acceptance of puppetry, as Alasdair, a fellow patient, notes in his definition of it as the first rung of the ladder "back" to normality. '"You must rehabilitate yourself as they would say,"'[46] from the current institution to the institution of marriage. His comment parodies the normalizing drive, according to whose denied discourse life is a journey whose destination is conformity. However, for such a journey to be embarked upon with conviction, Josephine's experience, or her experience of her experience, must first be incited to conform with, and replicate, that of the hypothetical consensus.

---

[45] Laing, R. D., *The Politics of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 73
[46] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 64

The party-goers, who represent this consensus, have not only clearly accomplished this feat, but bizarrely seem to *know* that they have done so. As one girl remarks to another, having surveyed a photograph, '"Not very like you, of course, but awfully good,"'[47] implicitly suggesting that 'so' would have been a more appropriate conjunction than 'but.' This exchange illustrates how the much sought-after resemblance to an agreed ideal depends upon the suppression and subsequent loss of authentic identity.

While Josephine is aware of the intended purpose of her hospitalization, if not of the motives for the attempts to reconstruct her, outside, this phenomenon is less easily defined since, within the social, the source of unease is harder to locate. Foucault addressed this issue in an interview, identifying questions discouraged by the normalizing drive.

> Who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? [...] How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken? All these questions seem to me to be fundamental ones today. And I don't believe that this question of "who exercises power?" can be resolved unless that other question "how does it happen?" is resolved at the same time.[48]

The implication is that these questions grow into and out of each other, just as the question of what *constitutes* experience is inextricable from that of the place of the intersection of experience and its mode of representation. Inside the hospital, it is obvious to Josephine who is exercising power and how, although on whose behalf they are acting is shown to be a far more complex question and, perhaps, the wrong one to be asking.

Foucault's micropolitical critique of modern formulations of power collapses the distinction between the concerns of the individual and those of "the social," since

---

[47] *The Ha-Ha* p. 76

the social as a category seems only to exist as internalized by its subjects as something under threat from dissenters. Ironically, however, it is only the sense of threat attributed to these dissenters that keeps the idea of the social from being exposed as a myth. As the Laingian critic Howarth-Williams argues '*the common object does not actually have to exist.* It is sufficient that the members of the series believe it to be so.'[49] The scapegoating of "non-normalized" subjects for the construct of the threatened decline of the social produces a phenomenon that would otherwise lack both impetus and credibility. Such scapegoats are vilified for undermining the social when, ironically, it is only their construction as a category that sustains a belief in the social. This belief in turn produces the off-shoot belief in the sanctity of "normality," as the bedrock of the sustained homogeneity of the group.

In *The Ha-Ha,* Dawson distinguishes the hospital, where Josephine paradoxically feels less under threat, from the social where "the holocaust of experience at the altar of conformity" is denied. Against a background of coercion, where the category "mental illness" is forcibly imposed, as in a factory producing machines to ease and promote the smooth running of factories, the ha-ha is an interstitial point, a piece of land 'overlooked by the gardeners.'[50] Significantly, its resonance is not only structural but semantic, as Josephine's laughter, cited as evidence of her illness, represents another inner space of potential freedom, from whose perspective the normalizing drive can be seen with greater clarity and hence can be demystified.

---

[48] Kritzman, L. D. (ed.), *Michel Foucault. Politics Philosophy Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984,* trans. by A. Sheridan & others (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 103

[49] Howarth-Williams, M., *R. D. Laing. His work and its relevance for sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977), p. 34

[50] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 26

This piece of land has an added mystique for Josephine, as this is where she first meets Alasdair, with whom, miraculously, she finds she can converse. In fact, conversation is possible precisely because they meet on uncharted ground. This phenomenon is illuminated by Karl Jaspers, who defines boundary situations, 'death, suffering, struggle and guilt' as 'the font from which we draw the assurance of our being.'[51] Dawson implies in her novel that unmediated experience is only possible away from the gaze of the metaphorical gardeners, intent on pruning and classifying all they look upon. The ha-ha is not a site of evasion, but a place where the marginalized minority vantage-point, minority in the sense of having resisted self-mystification, can try to formulate itself, unhounded by the normalizing drive.

When Josephine's anger surfaces, in the form of the rejection of paternalism in all its manifold guises, it rejects, by extension, the passivity instilled by an absence of anger. As an end in itself, she claims her experience as her own, and thereby breaks the deadlock of complicity by which she has been constrained for most of the novel.

> I was asking myself why I had ever wanted [...] to squeeze myself out of the real experiences that were mine, into a box that did not fit [...].What the textbook could mean by schizophrenia was only that whereas most flies crawl along the ceiling in a well-balanced, decorous posture talking about the other sex, or income tax allowances or the articles of faith that ought to be taught in prep schools, some see how things really are on the ceiling, upside down, and get anxious and frightened, or want to laugh at the incongruity and oddness of that fantastic position [...]. Some are well-mannered and walk along the ceiling talking about the rearing of children and *art brut*, or the property rules. But it's absurd. The posture's absurd![52]

This metaphor recalls Krim's pronouncement that 'one day the prisoners of this definition [insanity] will walk beside us sharing only the insane plight of mortality itself, which makes quiet madmen of us all.'[53] The implication is that the human

---

[51] Jaspers, K., *Philosophy Vol. 2*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 199

[52] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 106

[53] Krim, S., *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* (New York: Excelsior Press, 1961), pp. 59-75

condition renders some degree of "madness" inevitable. However, those who acquire the label "mad," or its latter-day equivalents, are those whose failure to deny this realization poses a threat to those who would prefer not to contemplate such possibilities.

In the same vein, Cioran argues that 'a *conscious* fruit fly would have to confront exactly the same difficulties, the same kind of insoluble problems as man.'[54] All Dawson's fiction implies a correlation between the intensity of the preoccupation with the "insoluble problem" of existence and the awareness of the posture's inherent absurdity. Like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, the protagonist of Ward's *The Snake Pit* equates existence with 'playing a piano piece [...]. If you didn't think about it you could tear through the piece without faltering, but if you began to wonder about what was coming next you were sunk.'[55] Josephine, however, distracted by the nature of the piece in its entirety, thus tends to lose her momentum. Her breakthrough is symbolized by her shift of focus from the inherent absurdity of the entire composition to the nature of each individual note.

'"Press on regardless!"'[56] the other students bray at her as they speed past on their bicycles, but the platitude eludes her, even as a platitude. Since she perceives her experience as a conscious upside-downness in a finite space, the direction in which she presses on lacks any kind of relevance, since the ultimate destination can only be a wall, signifying the end of existence. Virginia, in *The Snake Pit*, is equally non-plussed by majority attitudes. 'Always the command to hurry and you hurried nowhere, you arrived nowhere.'[57] Yet, as in the case of Josephine, the first shift in

---

[54] Cioran, E. M., *The Trouble With Being Born*, trans. by R. Howard (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), p. 31
[55] *The Snake Pit*, p. 245
[56] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 7
[57] *The Snake Pit*, p. 37

perspective, the prerequisite of breakthrough, relies on the journey being experienced as an end in itself. The sufferings of Sisyphus presumably sprang primarily from an awareness of his condition; however, Camus famously argued that the trick was to imagine Sisyphus happy.

With Alasdair, Josephine begins to inhabit the moment and, although he betrays her, she retains her capacity to immerse herself in her actions and perceptions. 'I existed. There was that aura surrounding people, and I had never stood in it before [...]. My spirits soared at this assault on life.'[58] The moment becomes its own reward and, at the moment of this realization, she and the moment are finally one and the same. By surrendering herself, she acquires an "awareness of self" that, paradoxically, can only be reclaimed by the act of surrender.

'I seemed to have acquired solidity, edges and boundaries.'[59] 'The future was there all around us,'[60] she recalls. 'I obeyed the summons to share what reality there was with someone else' as 'part of the mysterious instructions to use any means you have to cling to that which is real because it may establish something further.'[61] This implicit challenge to those who interpret her experience as aberrant and in urgent need of correction breaks the deadlock of her habit of defensive withdrawal.

This phenomenon of breakthrough is one that Dawson explores in greater depth in her later novels. However, as her fiction develops, the emphasis shifts from a focus on inner experiences, from which can be inferred the wider conflicts that produce them, to a more detailed *exploration* of these conflicts, from which a resolution can be interstitially conceptualized. In *The Ha-Ha*, the disparity between Josephine's inner world and the illness attributed to her is glaringly apparent, not least

---

58 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 108-9
59 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 110
60 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 119

in the language through which each is conveyed. However, as Dawson's fiction evolves, the phenomenon of complicity moves centre-stage and blurs the distinction. While the depiction of Josephine's experience in *The Ha-Ha* is illuminated by Laingian interpretations of madness as inextricably linked to the scapegoating procedures employed by "the group," her later fiction portrays her protagonists' experience as "unliveable" because of their *connivance* with the group. Laing and Esterson argue that

> *Without exception*, the experience and behaviour that gets labelled schizophrenic is a *special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unliveable situation.* [...] This state of affairs may not be perceived as such by any of the people in it. The man at the bottom of the heap may be being crushed and suffocated to death without anyone noticing, much less intending it. The situation here described is impossible to see by studying the different people in it singly. The social system, not single individuals extrapolated from it, must be the object of study.[62]

The second half of this assertion refers to the internalization, and subsequent transmission, of social strategies (as can be seen, for example, when men do to women what they imagine their culture has already done to them, and women acquiesce with and even activate this process). The first half implies that the labelling of someone as "schizophrenic" is

> a social fact and the social fact *a political event*. This political event [...] rationalizes a set of social actions whereby the labelled person is annexed by others, who are legally sanctioned, medically empowered, and morally obliged, to become responsible for the person labelled. The person labelled is inaugurated not only into a role, but into a career of patient.[63]

Josephine's challenge is to free herself from this rôle but, in order to do so, she must first construct the inner resources which will enable her to negotiate life without it. She muses, 'there were two sides to everything, I knew. If I turned over I might reach the other side. But the voices and music intervened and thrust themselves

---

61 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 121

62 Laing, R. D., *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 95

between, and I lay there suspended.'[64] The only way to live the life she knows she has to live, because it is the only one she *can* live, is, as she comes to realize, to "reach the other side" *amongst* the alien voices and music, in other words, to grasp the nature of the interstitial.

Hannah Green concludes her novel *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* with a resolution to the same dilemma. Deborah, the protagonist, has been flung through the vicissitudes of madness, but ultimately decides to face the music. Her inner dialogue is transcribed as follows:

> I am going to hang with the world.
> But the world is lawless and wild...
> Nevertheless.
> Remember your own children - remember Hitler and the bomb.
> In spite of it.[65]

Similarly, the breakthrough in Dawson's novel is activated by, and is ultimately synonymous with, the rejection of compliance and passivity, and their replacement with the sudden urge to preserve experience from sacrifice at the altar of conformity.

Foucault sought to demonstrate how speech, or the incitement to speech, can constitute a veiled means of imposing normalization. The discursive construction of the subject, he argues, precipitates a moment of uncanny self-recognition, through which the subject is taught to recognize and henceforth to regard himself as inherently pathological. This dynamic casts light on the experience of Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, who perceives the exchange of words as a game with sinister undertones, and whose rules never cease to mystify her. She experiences dialogue as a series of traps, and imagines that her attempts at response are merely perceived as pauses in which her

---

[63] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 100
[64] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 90
[65] *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*, p. 252

opponent plans his next assault. She feels perpetually preyed upon and goaded into revelatory speech, a phenomenon illuminated by a Foucauldian analysis of this dynamic.

The ward sister is overt in her eagerness to pounce, fixing her captive in her gaze, and reminiscing tearfully about the Holocaust, in the hope of initiating some form of exchange. These tactics represent a more desperate version of her mother's flirtatious probings, recalled even now with a feeling of nausea. '"May we ask about it?" she asked at length, in her bright, interested way, standing by my shoulder. "Unless, of course, it's a "top secret,"" she added musingly with her head on one side, her eyes glinting mischievously,'[66] and her posture like that of a snake, poised to strike. Even Mrs. Maybury, for whom Josephine works as part of her "rehabilitation," simpers, ' "I do hope you are liking us...," [...] waiting like the Sister for [her] to corroborate something.'[67] However, Josephine's inability to oblige is precisely why rehabilitation is seen to be required.

Ironically, by contrast, the formation of Josephine's tenuous bond with Alasdair, her *chosen* form of rehabilitation, is perceived as a threat and hence discouraged. Yet its relative success, despite, or rather because of, the pain it engenders, is due to the fact that it represents an authentic exchange. Thus, although its removal precipitates the breakdown, her recollection of it is part of the breakthrough. Sass maintains that

> For many schizophrenics, the very act of looking at someone or being seen by them comes to be experienced as a sort of ultimate, ontological battle [...]. The issue, in the vocabulary of one schizophrenic's delusional system, is whether to be an "operator" or a "thing."[68]

---

[66] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 54

[67] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 42

[68] Sass, L., *The Paradoxes of Delusion. Wittgenstein, Schreber and the schizophrenic mind* (Ithaca, New York & London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 121

Laing and Cooper develop this argument by implying that "operator status" depends upon casting one's interlocutor as a "thing," in order to pre-emptively avert the perceived threat of one's own reification.

> The praxis of the struggle is [...] given in each person's case as his comprehension of his being-as-an-object. The struggle as a reciprocity is a function of the reciprocity of comprehensions. If one of the adversaries ceases to comprehend, he becomes simply a manipulable object of the other. In the struggle, each person is a negation of a negation, aiming not only to transcend his own being as an object, but to liquidate the other for whom he is an object, and thus recoup his objectivity.[69]

This analysis confirms Foucault's contention that power in its generality has ceased to be dynastic. Instead it is manifested as a dynamic charge, without which the social network would not only be untenable, but unthinkable. The fear of becoming a "thing" and of the loss of one's power to "operate" is an anxiety dramatized in the process by which a subject is pronounced to be mentally ill. Since those who recognize the nature of "interaction" must be silenced lest the ruse of normalization be exposed, first a disease, schizophrenia, is posited, with the sufferer henceforward referred to as schizophrenic. Thereafter, their way of interpreting experience can be reduced to a symptom of the disease, and, having been thus pathologized, can be dismissed as delusional (and thereby liquidated as a threat). In the modern era, the most effective means of silencing someone is to invalidate them, and the most efficient mode of invalidation is the declaration that they are "mentally ill."

Significantly, it is only when Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* explicitly acknowledges this fact, that she mobilizes herself against her own passivity. In the wake of the realization that the hospital is 'a place for the remnants and droppings of society,'[70] she confronts her experience and the way it jars with majority expectations. Through Alasdair, she glimpses the possibility of something which is neither an ontological

---

[69] *Reason and Violence*, p. 175

battle, nor a solipsistic and self-referential world. 'At least something was real, even if it was only my arm being drawn along, and something at the other end of it, leading me.'[71] Clearly, being led is not the answer, but the reality of a shared situation is a step towards a different way of seeing. Alasdair, who is preoccupied with his own dilemmas of self-definition, thus feels no need to define her.

Szasz aphoristically declares that 'in the animal kingdom, the rule is eat or be eaten; in the human kingdom, define or be defined.'[72] He equates this struggle for definition, the struggle to be "an operator" rather than "a thing," with the archetypal struggle for life itself.

> In the typical Western two men fight desperately for the possession of a gun that has been thrown to the ground: whoever reaches the weapon first, shoots and lives; his adversary is shot and dies. In ordinary life, the struggle is not for guns but for words: whoever first defines the situation is the victor; his adversary, the victim [...]. In short, he who first seizes the word imposes reality on the other: he who defines thus dominates [...]; he who is defined is subjugated.[73]

An awareness of the accuracy of this analogy is a close approximation to what Sass defines as evidence of the existence of "schizophrenia."

At the party, which represents the social in its generality, it is only tacitly that Josephine finds herself dismissed as aberrant and therefore she can find no way to re-establish herself. The assaults of the doctors, however, are more overt, so she is able to counter them in a more direct way. In response to their question about the reasons for her silence, she assures them, '"I used to say quite a lot of things [...]. But they always turned out to be wrong [...]. Consequently the output grew poorer and poorer until finally they caught me out at Waterminster Place."'[74]

---

[70] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 97
[71] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 98
[72] Szasz, T., *The Second Sin* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1973), p. 20
[73] *The Second Sin*, pp. 21-22
[74] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 152

This reference to the scene of her exposure underlines the indistinguishability of the conceptual foundations of the social machine and the psychiatric machine, where the failure of the one leads to the interception of the other, which is held in reserve. The hospital staff, overtly, and Josephine's "friends," implicitly, all wage a form of linguistic war on her. Each response is reduced to a specimen for examination, which is then invoked to classify and invalidate the respondent.

It was Freud who first inaugurated this method in the "therapeutic" field. Language was given the status of a scientific specimen whose content could yield clues about the nature of the speaker's affliction. Speech was thus medicalized and potentially pathologized. Reduced to an agent of the classification process, it was used to identify non-conformists, and submit them to tacit disciplinary procedures. This phenomenon is illustrative of Foucault's contention that power has undergone a transition from something oppressive to an inherently productive and complicitous dynamic.

Alasdair in *The Ha-Ha* is outside this process in his relations with Josephine since he has his own concerns, which sporadically intersect with hers. He observes that the others are '"so busy finding husbands, and houses, and good income brackets that they haven't time to be conscious."'[75] Interestingly, however, it is the fact that the novelistic incarnations of the archetypes to whom he refers have *internalized* the normalizing drive that causes them to unconsciously single out Josephine in order to validate their own homogenous assumptions, ambitions and desires. Not only does this scapegoating function as a substitute for "becoming conscious;" it implicitly denies the validity of such consciousness, since it is Josephine's embodiment of it which is cited as a symptom of her "illness."

"'It's not sex,'" Alasdair continues, "'that divides the human race in two, but this awful splendid quality of having it all taped [...]. It's the awful power of possession, of seeing the world as an inventory, a container [...] and other people as [...] tin-openers'" who can "'undo it for you.'"[76] This observation defines the distinction between being an "operator" and a "thing" but, to Alasdair, as to Josephine, neither one particularly appeals.

---

[75] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 105
[76] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 105

Josephine sees life as a set of rules whose nature eludes her. Although these rules adopt manifold guises, they all manifest themselves primarily through language.

> "I recall they say that it is discourteous to call one's Mother M. even though she is dead. All the laboratory assistants seem to agree on this point. So I noted it down in the book of rules that I am compiling for those who follow - N.B. that it is rude to call one's Mother M. even though she is dead."[77]

This specific reference echoes and focuses her earlier statement: "'I don't know the rules of life, and if I kept a phrase book for twenty years I would not know the right answers.'"[78]

Edward Said credits Foucault with having contextualized and thus demystified the prevalence of these rules, by having formulated "metarules."

> What enables a doctor to practise medicine or a historian to write history is not mainly a set of intellectual gifts, but an ability to follow rules [...]. Foucault specified rules for those rules, and even more impressively, he showed how over long periods of time the rules became epistemological enforcers of what (as well as how) people thought, lived and spoke.[79]

In other words, continual reinforcement obscures both their nature and their purpose, until they are no longer experienced as rules. A self-sustaining cycle is thus established, resembling what, in nuclear physics, is known as a breeder reaction. Having reached a critical stage, the process in question comes to feed on itself, with no external impetus being required. Thus, in Foucauldian terms, knowledge and power are mutually reinforcing, with 'knowledge producing effects of power, and power producing effects of knowledge.'[80]

---

[77] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 151

[78] *The Ha-Ha*, pp. 100-101

[79] Said, E., 'Michel Foucault, 1926 - 1984' in *After Foucault*, ed. by Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), p. 10

[80] May, T., *'Between Genealogy and Epistemology' Psychology, Politics and Knowledge in the thought of Michel Foucault* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), p. 51

The etymological roots of the word "authority" are pertinent here, as the word "authority," like the word "authenticity," derives from the same root as the word "augment." This suggests that "truth" only comes to be accepted as such through a micropolitical process of gradual consolidation, and that its "authority" takes root as the result of internalized strategies that permeate the social. The label "mentally ill," as Laing and others argue, represents a response to the resistance to these strategies, since dissent must be undermined if the myth is to prevail. The irony, in Josephine's case, is that the symptoms labelled "illness," which the hospital tirelessly struggles to suppress, or, as they put it, "cure," are prefigurations of her breakthrough.

Lenore McCall, writing about her experience of having been institutionalized, draws a parallel, identical to that explored in *The Ha-Ha*, between the hospital's specific rules and the implicit set of more abstract rules that underlie "the social." She recalls being told, '"You're in an institution now where there are rules and regulations, just as there are outside this hospital. [...] You must conform to our standards which are no more stringent than the standards of the world to which we are going to return you."'[81] The veiled threat underlying this statement encapsulates a diagnostic of paternalism, the assumption that the defeat (referred to as "rehabilitation") of the recalcitrant individual is a foregone conclusion, thus conceptually confounding any thought of resistance. The social network takes conformity for granted, and enforces and reinforces it through the same channels which activate the latent charge of power. These methods are initially promoted within the family, to the degree where they are internalized and hence no longer recognized as rules. However, Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* proves resistant to these methods, so is disciplined by more explicit means.

---

[81] Geller & Harris, *Women of the Asylum* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994), pp. 289-290

Lacking the mechanism for taking things for granted, everything, by dint of the fact that it exists, raises questions *about* its existence, the purpose of which, at best, seems obscure. She remarks, for example, that '"Clothes always seem as though they are just pinned there, waiting to fall away. Not really mine at all, whatever I wear. Contingent, if you see what I mean."'[82] Unable to accept connections as natural and above question simply because they are taken for granted, Josephine finds them arbitrary to the point of unreality. In contrast to her own sense of the absurd, produced as much by the incongruity between her clothes and her body as between her body and her "self," she thinks of 'the women in pictures whose dresses seem to belong to them and grow from them like petals from a flower.'[83]

The response to being clothed (echoed in Dawson's second novel, *Fowler's Snare*, when Joanna looks at her friend Ruth's dress and observes in dismay that she seems 'to accept it as though it were part of the human condition'[84]) seems a metaphor for the experience of existing in the world. Those to whom this latter comes easily thus appear to be sprouting their outfits as if they and their clothes were one and the same. The implication, then, is that those who unquestioningly internalize the game, perfecting the strategies to keep them in the running, *produce* social "reality" from one moment to the next. This phenomenon is illuminated by Foucault's explanation of the ways in which convention *becomes* convention, and is maintained as such by self-policing subjects who internalize the need for synchronized behaviour and themselves become the wires through which the charge of normalization operates.

---

[82] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 65
[83] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 70
[84] Dawson, J. *Fowler's Snare* (London: Anthony Blond, 1962), p. 52

Like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, the protagonist of Emily Holmes Coleman's *The Shutter Of Snow* feels a sense of estrangement from her body and the bodies of those around her. 'Shapes, all of them grotesque, the female body. All of them with breasts that did not fit, and rotting elbows. Toenails and trailing hair.'[85] Breakdown is again linked not only with the fracture of language, but also with a crisis of physical identity.

In this context, Josephine recalls Waterminster Place, where 'faces popped on and off like lamps. Mouths clapped up and down; words shot in and out, but the room full of people seemed to have escaped me.'[86] In amazement, she surveys 'heads moving and twisting, mouths opening and shutting and receiving liquid and savoury biscuit. No one seemed to think it was at all a surprising situation to be in,'[87] even with the sky spilling in through the window. Later, when the nurses, with an air of forced joviality, are rousing the patients from sleep, there surfaces a need, which carries within it a poignant echo of why it is doomed to remain unfulfilled: 'I wanted the knack of existing. I did not know the rules.'[88]

The protosurrealist de Chirico famously recommended that the world should be lived in as if in a vast museum of strangeness, a description which captures Josephine's experience. Baffled by the rules of the game, she plays a game of her own, a solution not only strictly prohibited, but cited as proof of mental illness. The "vast museum of strangeness" through which she moves seems at its strangest precisely when it 'should' be most familiar, illustrating what Sass refers to as the 'cognitive symptoms that might be termed delusions of disbelief.' He notes that "the schizophrenic" may, for example, 'speak disbelievingly of "my so-called children and

---

[85] Holmes Coleman, E., *The Shutter Of Snow* (London: Virago, 1981), p. 11
[86] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 82
[87] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 79

the so-called hospital.'"[89] The alternative game concocted by Josephine, of which both her mother and the hospital staff, on different levels, try to cure her, consists of constructing conceptual juxtapositions even more outlandish than those presented by the external world.

She hallucinates prehistoric animals, although whether these hallucinations are involuntary or willed remains unclear. She recalls the students at Oxford 'waving from their bicycles as though they did not mind about the ungulates and the horned mammals having been there before them.'[90] In their rôle as the flies who unquestioningly traverse the ceiling, they conspiratorially discuss their future plans which are not in fact plans at all but simply anticipation of where the conveyor belt to which they have been nailed, and have nailed themselves, will deposit them next, in unison, to enact, as if programmed to do so, the demands of the next phase of the game. Meanwhile, the animals move through Josephine's mind, setting up a surreal juxtaposition.

The more smug people's attitudes about what they accept as self-evident, the greater the likelihood that the animals will put in an appearance, as if it is their rôle to redress the balance. It is, for example, Veronica Piercy, archetypal Oxford student and serene representative of reason, who catalyses Josephine's descent into hysteria. Had it not been for Veronica's glib pronouncement about "the way things are," Josephine would not have been distracted by 'the even-toed ungulates marching through the waste,'[91] thereby drawing attention to herself and prompting the Principal to recommend that she see a specialist.

---

[88] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 91
[89] Sass, p. 24
[90] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 10
[91] *The Ha-Ha*, pp. 12-13

The animals, particularly active at Oxford, are invoked at the hospital as a euphemism for Josephine's psychological collapse. '"Have the animals retreated?"'[92] the Sister enquires, in a bid for intimacy. So even the animals, symbol of unconscious counter-mystification, and counter-presence to all that is contrived, are appropriated, in name, at least, as if the hospital's purpose is to tame them. The subtext of the Sister's question is "Have you re-established yourself as Heir to all the Ages and as the culmination of the species?" Yet for Josephine the creatures are a vehicle through which the randomness and precariousness of all that is considered to be preordained, and now to be forever enshrined as "normal," can be realized and brought into focus.

Green's *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* articulates this phenomenon in slightly different terms. 'She [Esther] wanted to tell the stunned-looking girl in front of her that this sickness which everyone shied from [...]; these hidden worlds - all of them - and tongues and codes and propitiations were for her the means to stay alive in a world of anarchy and terror.'[93] Shreber offers another perspective, but one which reveals the same unease in the face of the ever-present threat of chaos which, in his case, he tries to keep at bay with a fixation on the world of language, as opposed to that of images. 'To make myself at least somewhat comprehensible I shall have to speak much in images and similes, which may at times perhaps be only *approximately* correct.'[94] Concerns like this about the accuracy, or lack of it, with which language can frame what it seeks to convey characterize the schizophrenic condition. Or, more to the point, the existence of these concerns is precisely what tends to be labelled "a condition," as a means of suppressing and invalidating dissent.

---

[92] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 13

[93] *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*, p. 59

[94] Shreber, D., *Memoirs of my mental illness*, trans. by Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 41

The label "schizophrenic" is a straitjacket impossible to discard for, having been acquired, all subsequent behaviour is seen to reinforce it. Even if the person thus defined does nothing "untoward" for many years, they are referred to thereafter as "schizophrenic in remission," implying that they need special vigilance lest they should "lapse."

Friedenberg cites an experiment conducted by D.L. Rosenhaus, where he and other members of a research team

> got themselves diagnosed as schizophrenic and committed to twelve different mental hospitals simply by complaining that they heard voices uttering single words like "empty" or "thud." Though they [...] behaved normally in hospital, none was recognized as sane by any of the hospital staff [...]. Whatever they did was simply interpreted by the staff [...] as mad: one nurse, for example recorded periodically on the chart of one research worker who was keeping careful notes on his experience that he 'engages in writing behaviour.' [...] Meanwhile, about a third of the *bona fide* patients [...] detected the imposture almost immediately.[95]

The findings of this experiment suggest a faulty mechanism in those labelled mentally ill, which prevents them from being taken in by the misappropriation of social rôles. This hypothesis is reinforced by an episode related by Sacks, where the mad and the sane, together in a room, listen to the President's speech. The "intact" listen earnestly, while the "damaged" give way to mirth, recognizing not only the hypocrisy but the multiple techniques of false logic. 'Here then was the paradox of the President's speech,' he concludes. 'We normals [...] were indeed well and truly fooled. ("*Populus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur*"). And so cunningly was deceptive word use combined with deceptive tone, that only the brain-damaged remained intact, undeceived.'[96] Within the social network, this resistance to deception is seen to pose a threat, which explains the segregation and attempted "re-education" of people like Josephine in *The*

---

[95] Friedenberg, p. 55

[96] Sacks, O., *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1986), p. 80

Ha-Ha. This is a theme that Dawson explores in greater depth and in different spheres in all her later novels. As Szasz argues, the

> aim of psychiatric classification - and by this I mean the aim of such categorization inferred from its actual consequences - is to degrade and socially segregate the mental patient; in short, the covert aim of psychiatric classification is the social stigmatization and the creation of a class of [...] persecuted scapegoats.[97]

Clearly the purpose of the process is radically at odds with its purported aim, which is to "cure" the mad "for their own good." The semantic obfuscation that underpins the paternalistic discourse is another theme that surfaces throughout Dawson's fiction.

In Dawson's first novel, the assurance of being that Josephine draws from the ha-ha stems from the fact that here she can muse upon the even-toed ungulates undisturbed. However, alone, she has no need for them, and hence they keep away since they appear merely to counteract the artificial boundaries that keep things in isolation from each other. This is especially evident in the realm of time, where the prehistoric, in animal form, impinges on the present, mocking the assumption that the present is the apex of the only route that history could have taken.

A connection can be seen between the false comfort Josephine is afforded by her visions of the animals and the relief she feels in the hospital, as opposed to the wider social world. For just as the animals are atavistic reminders of the centrality of the arbitrary, humanity being the result of a purposeless process that never had it in mind, the methods of normalization employed by the hospital are a throwback to explicit forms of correction, pre-dating the denied operations of power that have now come to characterize the social.

This symbolic simultaneity of past and present, a projection of Josephine's bewilderment with social codes and rules, also represents an attempt at resistance. If

---

[97] *Ideology and Insanity*, p. 239

the behaviour labelled "madness" manifests itself as a reluctance to play a game where one's defeat appears a foregone conclusion, hallucinations that dramatize the implosion of time are a contextually intelligible symptom. The sculptor, Jessie Watkins, describes a similar episode where accepted reality seemed to recede. 'I was just struggling like something that had no brain at all [...] as if I were just struggling for my own existence against other things that were opposing me.'[98]

In this context, Von Doramas argues that schizophrenic "thought disorder" results from the patient 'following non-Aristotelian logic. To illustrate: a schizophrenic may equate a stag with an Indian by focusing on a characteristic shared feature - namely, swiftness of movement.'[99] By this token, Watkins locates her experience at a pre-social level, where existence is characterized by the struggle to survive. Since, at her *actual* point in time and space, she perceives her existence as a metaphysical struggle, her experience dissolves into that of a fantasized creature to whom such an experience would resemble her own, in literal rather than metaphorical terms. The non-Aristotelian link is that both are engaged in the struggle to resist annihilation.

Ironically, it is the primacy of enlightenment patterns of logical cause and effect that produces alternative patterns, although these paradoxically reproduce the same conceptual framework. To dismiss these alternative patterns of thought as delusional is to miss, and thereby perpetuate, the point. The agency of others is a constant threat, to which the "schizophrenic" is particularly attuned; indeed, it is an awareness of precisely this predicament that tends to be labelled schizophrenic.

In *The Ha-Ha*, the problem with Josephine's preoccupations, apart from those imposed by other people, is that they subsume her energies and paralyse her

---

[98] *The Politics of Experience*, pp. 123-124

will. She says, 'Something intervened between me and my potential wrath every time [...]. The chanceyness of it all [...]. There were so many things in the world... and it might so easily not have been at all.'[100] Her plans, disclosed at the party, to observe "the animals" away from civilization, provoke the laughter cited as evidence of her illness. It is not the animals *in themselves*, or the inane social chatter *in itself*, that precipitate the laughter, but simply the thought that the two can coexist in a single world. On another occasion, her mother's hesitation in planning an assault on a troublesome snail calls forth, simultaneously, detachment and intensity of focus. 'While the snail beat up and down, the neighbour's wireless played. I carefully suppressed a smile at these two opposite ends of existence coming together like that.'[101]

In this context, Sass contends that the 'schizophrenic' experience of 'the tremendous particularity of things and events [...] suggests that these phenomena must be the specific way they are for some reason or because of some purposeful plan.'[102] This phenomenon strengthens the Szaszian claim that the symptoms labelled mental illness are an attempted solution to a panoply of "problems in living." Since living is inherently problematic, its recognition as such and the resulting search for a solution are, in Laingian terms, contextually intelligible. However, the normalizing drive, whose aim is to homogenize experience and conduct, implicitly denies the nature of this context in order to ensure its own survival. If experience were accepted as complex and various, the suppression of dissent would lose its motivation and momentum. This would prove fatal for the normalizing drive, since it is only through

---

[99] Szasz, T., *The Myth Of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 37
[100] *The Ha-Ha*, pp. 38-39
[101] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 60
[102] Sass, p. 101

the conversion of dissenters that the myth of "normality" can be upheld and sustained.

Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* never deludes herself, but the point of the novel is that she not only rejects the particular "reality" on offer, but that she rejects the very premise that any kind of meaning is to be found. Sherlock Holmes called it a capital offence to theorize in the absence of data, and the kernel of Josephine's ultimate breakthrough resides in her resistance to this impulse. She recoils from the form as well as from the content of accepted definitions of reality.

The animals who parade through Josephine's mind, trampling over falsities enshrined as unimpeachable truths, are never construed as coded containers of meaning. Similarly, the cracks on the ceiling, her metaphor for existence, are not perceived as coded communications; they are simply seen as cracks. This form of dissent is seen to pose a threat because, being manifested structurally, not just in terms of content, it diverges from accepted views of madness. It rejects false solutions and simply surveys in bafflement the taking-for-granted of "the real."

The incongruity of the juxtapositions engenders a thrill because every time the mammals loom, ritual is exposed for what it is. The catharsis generated by the hint of the ludicrous derives its dynamic from the element of surprise that wrenches life from its furrow, highlights the centrality of arbitrariness and reveals that there is no single way to live. Josephine recalls her mother

> digesting a biscuit, or lying, grey and withered, with Father, while around her raced the arthropods, the pigs, the hippopotami, the even-toed ungulates and the ruminants (rumini?). They pranced and they danced, and I laughed and I laughed [...] [T]he animals romped round the bedside table, and round mother who was grey and withered [...]. I wondered how she would fare among the cephalopods or the artiodactyles. They had such a lot in common, but they were so different.[103]

---

[103] *The Ha-Ha*, pp. 60-62

In this sense, on a conceptual level, constraint can be seen to summon rebellion since, by definition, any monument to certainty carries within it the threat of doubt and the concomitant suggestion of the absurd.

Josephine is unconvinced by the connections between unrelated elements. The possessions she accrues, and even her name, seem random. The yardsticks of identity fail to contain her, since, as she perceives it, there is nothing to be contained except the illusory entity these yardsticks imply. There is only what is called forth by the moment and, although these presences leave a residue behind, they resist taking the form of something static. She says,

> There were so many things in the world drifting apart and together, and waiting for a heavy wind to scatter them finally for good. They floated round and round me, shifting, forming and dissolving, as I sat there clutching those [...] members that happened to be mine.[104]

Josephine perceives herself as a conglomeration of disparate parts that are constantly modelled anew. No central force binds anything together, but neither does anything feel definitively distinct, despite the compulsive imposition of artificial boundaries. The sporadic encroachment of the mammals unleashes her mirth because it challenges the denial of their conceptually pivotal rôle. She asks, '"Suppose there were six leopards and six ladies, would you, *ought you*, to say, "twelve legs human and twenty-four legs leopard," or should one rather say, quite straight and simply, "thirty-six legs and six tails?"'" Her mother's response, '"We don't, *you know* we don't, make bones about things like that,"'[105] only makes the question seem more pressing and intriguing.

With her preoccupations deemed unworthy of concern, Josephine's rejection of conventional modes of self-definition is expressed through a withdrawal from

---

[104] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 156
[105] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 62

speech. Although at school she was *aware* that she drew attention to herself by 'thinking the wrong things and letting them loose verbally,'[106] Oxford's deceptive aura of freedom catches her off her guard, since here the absence of explicit rules masks the assumption that these rules are already internalized. Although aware that the world functions according to mysterious codes, learning by rote seems a waste of time to her, since the randomness of everything renders it unlikely that a given combination of factors will ever arise again.

Her sense of inadequacy is so keenly felt in the realm of speech that she feels 'reduced to silence by the things the others got round so easily.'[107] Even her name seems nothing to do with her and, seeing it written, she recalls that

> it was the hit-or-miss of these words that struck me most. I knew the collocution was supposed to represent me and no one else, but it always seemed odd that so loose an approximation as a name could have a claim on you, could intervene in your life, could summon you to the gallows, or to a party out of the blue like that.[108]

Her name's unchanging nature seems incongruous with the kaleidoscopic demands of the situations she encounters, as these seem to activate a stream of unconnected subject positions. Alasdair echo this unease about language when he says, "'Words are always inadequate to express the complexity of a situation.'"[109]

When, having fled the asylum, she is asked whether she is Josephine Traughton, it sounds 'so funny, so inexact, and so improbable' that she is fleetingly at a loss for words. However, considering it 'such a second-rate accusation that it hardly rang true,' she finally emphatically proclaims, "'I never was that name [...]. Though I once tried to be. It was not a success though.'" She recounts to the policeman that "'that name and address had never been more than a very rough and ready

---

[106] *The Ha-Ha*, pp. 8-9
[107] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 11
[108] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 53

approximation to the truth. Many things had happened to change the course of my life since the days when they were established. These data were therefore anachronisms and could hardly be said to hold.'"[110] This exchange recalls a similarly abortive attempt at dialogue between nurse and patient in Lessing's *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. '"Can you remember your name now perhaps?"

"My *name*! But I've had so many names."'[111] Such shorthand for "identity" is portrayed as inherently misrepresentative and invalid, since it seeks to reduce something irreducible and contain something diffuse and ever-changing. In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's resistance to the categorizing tendencies of the normalizing drive is revealed through a dread of this inherent inexactitude. Her name seems to symbolize the split between the object of consciousness and consciousness itself, and to deny the fluid nature of subjectivity. Since the concept of continuous identity is an effect of language, she opts to withdraw into silence.

She patiently explains to an employee of the hospital, '"I assure you, there's nothing I want to be cured of,"' remembering how 'they used to do that often, asking me primarily why I remained silent and would not talk to them. It was funny that they could not see this, namely that besides it not being necessary [...], there was nothing actually that I wanted to say.'[112] This comment highlights the clash of interests that renders her contact with the hospital staff so fraught with antagonism and so symbolic of ontological deadlock. For it is vital to the doctors that she be compelled to speak, since her own choice of language is the vehicle through which she is to be categorized and tamed and through which, if necessary, incited to see that E.C.T. is required if this should fail. This theme of compelled complicity is explored from different

---

[109] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 123
[110] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 148
[111] *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*, p. 132

perspectives and in greater depth in Dawson's later novels.

[112] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 149

The Continuum Of Invalidation

Current formulations of power, as theorized by Foucault, rely on the internalization of normalization techniques. Force is undesirable, even as a last resort, as its use denotes the failure of more refined methods, consolidated syncretically by the social. In fact, Foucault defined "civilization" as synonymous with this consolidation, where surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if its application is discontinuous. Thus 'the perfection of power should render its actual exercise unnecessary' and social subjects 'should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.'[113] While a subject resistant to self-policing is a danger in itself, one like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* who fails even to *recognize* herself as a subject poses an even greater threat, since she lacks the psychic permeability through which self-surveillance techniques can be instilled. Someone who experiences her name as a random appendage, no more representative of her than the label 'schizophrenic,' thus becomes a target for "re-education" strategies. However, Josephine's rejection of the form, not just the content, of behaviour labelled "normal" calls for the use of force, which in the hospital takes the form of chemical constraint and the threat of surgical invasion.

Josephine's predicament is echoed by the protagonist of Rhys's *Tigers are Better Looking*, who observes, "'It isn't being pretty and it isn't being sophisticated [that counts]. It's being - adapted, that's what it is. And it isn't any good *wanting* to be adapted, you've got to be born adapted.'" The narrative continues, "'Adapted to the livid sky, the ugly houses, the grinning policemen, the placards in shop windows.'"[114]

---

[113] Foucault, M., *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 201

[114] *Tigers are Better Looking*, p. 76

Again, the focus is on incongruous juxtapositions, as if an awareness of incongruity is itself a symptom of resistance to the state of being "adapted."

In *The Ha-Ha*, as in her later fiction, Dawson explores the effects of the myriad dialects of the normalizing discourse by which Josephine is constrained throughout the novel. Her mother's controlling presence, characterized by constant intrusions into her experience, and subsequent tacit attempts to *undermine* this experience, is replaced, on her death, by the psychiatric discourse, which is a variation on the theme.

Josephine confides to Alasdair by the ha-ha that ""Mother used not to like the way I laughed so much. She used to call me "her giggly girl," or if it grew excessive, "the giggly one.""[115] The process of invalidation was thus already underway long before she fell into the hands of the psychiatrists, with their more explicit methods of examining her through unseeing eyes and defining her experience as symptomatic of illness. The language of "cure" and "treatment," that semantically establishes a self-fulfilling prophecy, implies that, if she co-operates with the psychiatrists, she will shortly be adapted to the mainstream world, which only someone "mentally ill" could perceive as undesirable. The defensive suppression of the "symptoms" of the authentic experience from which her mother sought to alienate her establishes such a habit that not only does she feel estranged from the way of life promoted by her mother. She also feels incredulous with regard to her *own* experience for, if she allowed herself to inhabit it completely, she could no longer be sure that she was giving nothing away.

Although her mother's existence is validated by attempted forays across the borders of her daughter's world, at the same time she seems desperate to enforce a

world that replicates her own. Her motives are mystifying since, if her own experience is so desirable that it must be reproduced at any cost, what prevents her from simply inhabiting it? Paradoxically, while the chief diagnostic of Mrs. Traughton's existence is her determination for her daughter to reproduce it, nothing exists to replicate apart from this determination. Left to her own devices, she falls back on ritual, conserving her energies in readiness for future assaults. Significantly, however, her motives are not consciously malign, a phenomenon explored more deeply in Dawson's later novels.

Having internalized Foucault's panoptic principle, Josephine's mother's identity seems not to extend beyond her function as an instrument of surveillance. Her social purpose is to prevent deviation, but to the question, deviation from *what*, the answer would presumably be, deviation from being like me; a perplexing one given that she is nothing more than an instrument of surveillance. However, such behaviour is contextualized by the Szaszian contention that 'those used to being watched by Big Brother expect to be on stage; they know how to hide there behind a mask of impersonation. Alone, without an audience, with no one watching, they meet themselves - and, having met a ghost, are properly frightened.'[116]

With reference to the Sartrean choice between being nothing and impersonating oneself, Josephine's mother embodies the option of self-impersonation. Yet this impersonation has become so ingrained that its original object appears to have been lost, and routine has intervened to fill the gap. Foucault's theories demystify this process of the consolidation of habit, where 'time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.'[117] As an instrument of tacit control

---

[115] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 33
[116] *Ideology and Insanity*, p. 162-3
[117] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 152

and a microcosmic version of the panopticized social, Mrs. Traughton functions as her own *symbolic* audience. As a Foucauldian "self-policing subject," her internalization of the *idea* of an audience casts her not only as her daughter's gaoler but also, implicitly, as her own. Ward describes the enactment of this phenomenon in *The Snake Pit*. 'In case a nurse might be watching for her reaction, Virginia laughed when the others laughed and clapped when the others clapped.'[118] Significantly, one can only be returned to the outside world when one has ceased to be aware of the mechanics of these manœuvres, or if this awareness is disguised.

Josephine's mother functions in the novel to reinforce the random boundaries of "acceptability," whose transgression carries the penalty of ever more vigilant scrutiny and increasingly sustained acts of invasion. However, it seems that the purpose of these limits is not so much to constrain her daughter's experience, as to define her conduct and how she might hypothetically be perceived.

> "We decided [...] I would launch myself on the West End and buy a really smart dress, one that would really fill the bill [...]. Mother suggested coming with me. She seemed a little anxious lest wily assistants should coax me into buying the wrong kind of dress."[119]

Her recollection that 'it was too difficult to explain' why she *wanted* 'the wrong kind of dress'[120] dramatizes the full force of her mother's techniques of control, which create a situation where even the thought of resistance is pre-empted. For a deadlock has been reached between the social world, of which Josephine has always been so wary, and her mother, who now appears to be opposing this world, but as whose emissary she has hitherto cast herself. The Laingian double-bind that this situation illustrates presages a scene in Mercer's *In Two Minds*, where Kate, like Josephine, is floundering in a clothes shop, under the surveillance of her mother. The

---

118 *The Snake Pit*, p. 85
119 *The Ha-Ha*, p.56-7

uncharacteristic self-assurance in her announcement, 'This is exactly what I wanted,' is so eroded by the double-bind established by her mother that, despite the ostensible assurances, she so absorbs the denied insinuations that in the end she meekly concedes, 'I don't think it's right for me.'[121]

Alasdair in *The Ha-Ha* functions neither as a *deus ex machina* nor as a vehicle of salvation. He is, however, someone with whom dialogue is possible. His first question, '"And have you solved the problem of killing time, or have you resigned for the time being, as far as being alive is concerned?"'[122] is not an altogether unsuccessful introduction. Josephine's tangential remark, '"Excuse me, [...] but if you do that I've lost my view,"'[123] is, since her arrival, her closest approximation of an authentic response, rather than one conceptually resembling the ink of a squid or one designed to coincide with what she imagines her interlocutor expects. What provokes people's animosity and mistrust is intimations of their own superfluity, but Alasdair, preoccupied with his own concerns, is indifferent to what she thinks of him.

His disclosure of his "problem" - his performance - leaves her none the wiser; merely producing a vague image of amateur theatricals, one perhaps less far from the truth than it might at first appear. He unwittingly initiates a clumsy Socratic dialogue and, while her initial responses seem pre-programmed ('"Mother used to say there were some things it was just not right to remember"'[124]), his railings against passivity indirectly catalyze her own. Hearing his perspective on the hospital, where the patients are '"pushed about to satisfy the sadistic instincts of the [...] social therapists, shouted

---

120 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 57
121 *In Two Minds*, p. 77
122 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 28
123 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 30
124 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 32

at and wheeled about like children,"'[125] she feels the first stirrings of an awareness of collusion. This realization that her passivity is oil to their machine signals the beginning of her breakthrough. His words set up a resonance with her suppressed inner voices and, referring to her mother, she blurts out vehemently, "'I am glad she's dead. The future can begin."'[126]

However, as Foucault demonstrates, unless liberation is informed by a demystification of the roots of constraint, the original instrument of oppression tends to conceptually replicate itself. The function of collusion in this dynamic is increasingly brought into focus as Dawson's fiction develops. This phenomenon is dramatized in *The Ha-Ha* when Josephine's escape from the clutches of the family leads to the intervention of the psychiatric hospital, which functions as a surrogate family. Cooper argues that

> madness [...] is a movement out of familialism (including family-modelled institutions) *towards autonomy*. This is the real "danger" of madness and the reason for its violent repression. Society should be one big happy family with hordes of obedient children. One must be mad not to want such an enviable state of affairs. And one is punished for madness.

The conventional punishment, as in Josephine's case, is 'psychiatric incarceration with all the violent trimmings - at least until your language - words and acts - becomes normally "grammatical" - and normally banal once again.'[127]

---

[125] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 38
[126] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 67
[127] in Porter, R. (ed.), *The Faber Book of Madness* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 448

Scapegoating As A Means Of Consolidating The Group

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's "madness" is an unconscious strategy devised as a means of withdrawal not only from her mother, but from everything her mother represents. However, this strategy is counter-productive, as it leads her to the hospital, which functions as a conceptual extension of her mother's world, suggesting that her mother's domain is a microcosm of the world, and as such is impossible to elude. The hospital Sister's function as a reformulation of Josephine's mother is implied from the outset when, as Josephine recalls, she 'leaned over and searched my face with her yearning eyes.'[128] The symptoms labelled schizophrenic, which include a kind of autism subconsciously devised as a defence against ontological engulfment, are thus, in Laingian terms, portrayed as contextually intelligible.

Throughout *The Ha-Ha*, Dawson presents Josephine's behaviour as a response to the ontological invasions of those who activate the normalizing drive, reinforced by the rhetoric of benevolence and the semantic contortions of "common sense." Josephine's anxieties are intelligible in the light of paternalism's inherent abusiveness (since its *sine qua non* is the denial and destruction of the agency of its "beneficiaries"). As Szasz contends, the most effective means of denying that psychiatric commitment is punishment is 'to clothe it in a mantle of therapeutic paternalism.'[129]

Cooper refers to psychiatry as 'after educational institutions, the third rung of family defence against autonomy on the part of its members - psychiatry, that is, along with special schools and prisons and a multiplicity of other more discrete rejection

---

[128] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 9

[129] Szasz, T., *Law, Liberty and Psychiatry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 43

situations.'[130] Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* progresses up these rungs in her transition from family, to university (as opposed to "special school"), and finally to psychiatric hospital. However, as Cooper's analogy suggests, these rungs are not conceptually distinct, since the discourse of normalization, which forms the ladder's sides, is the underlying equation of all these institutions, which articulate different dialects of the normalizing drive. The transition is therefore a process of syncretic consolidation, with Josephine's mother, or the phantom of her mother, gathering force even when physically absent, and the representatives of university life symbolically entering the hospital, in the form of the invitation to the party. Although they share the mantra "it's for your own good," each is engaged in stifling her autonomy and seeking to promote her dependence so that she loses the ability to exist without their negligible "help." Cooper expresses this phenomenon when he argues that

> The most benevolent institutions in our society become our oppressors in a way that relegates the gas chambers of Auschwitz to a *naïf* [...] attempt at massacre [...]. Techniques of annihilating bodies of course lead on to techniques of annihilating mind, and this whole region of *techne* has a platitudinous quality by now. The real horror of it though is that when it comes to minds no one reminds themselves to mind [...]. We [...] generate and are generated by an age of benevolent care.[131]

This continuum Cooper posits challenges the assumption that psychiatry and the family are isolated pockets of coercion. He presents them as illustrative of the ways in which reliance is generated, not only psychologically for the group's *symbolic* preservation, but also economically and politically for its *actual* preservation. The group's survival, as both idea and reality, rests on the conceptual construction and actual oppression of a "rival" group, either "foreign," and thus ready-made, or recruited from the ranks of the persecuting group itself. In each case, this phenomenon

---

[130] Cooper, D., *The Death of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 11
[131] *The Death of the Family*, p. 103

is sustained by the myth of benevolence, a pseudo-justification which directly inverts reality.

Cooper's continuum (which we "generate and are generated by") emphasizes the rôle of internalization, to the point at which the process acquires its own momentum and comes to permeate the social network. He further contends that clinical psychiatry is

> only a small part of an extensive system of violence, of normalizing techniques that commence with the principal conformism-inducing instrument of the bourgeois state, the family, and run on through [...] schooling and universities aiming to produce and then reproduce an endless assembly line of identical industrious creatures who all work for some Purpose which has long been lost sight of and which was never very visible in the first place.[132]

This argument casts light on the mystifying behaviour of Josephine's self-appointed "helpers" in *The Ha-Ha*, the motivations for whose excessive solicitude are perplexing, even (or, more accurately, especially) to themselves.

This phenomenon is illuminated by Foucault's theory that we inhabit a micropolitical age, where the internalization of a once centralized but now diffuse and ubiquitous disciplinary force has produced a panopticized society of micropolitical instruments of surveillance. The process is so ingrained that it goes unquestioned, especially since micropolitical power is a generative dynamic, in whose consolidation each social subject colludes.

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's awareness of the disparity between people's purported motivations and their actual motivations as inferred from their actions, poses a threat to the internalized consensus of the group. Her perspective must, therefore, be suppressed, but to obscure its true purpose this suppression masquerades as being in her own best interests. In this context, Howard Becker asserts that

---

[132] Cooper, D., *The Grammar of Living* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 55

> *social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*, and by applying these rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is *not* a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions [...]. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.[133]

Henry Maudsley's awareness of this phenomenon more than a century ago is revealed in his comment that 'lunatics and criminals are as much manufactured articles as are steam-engines and calico-printing machines.'[134]

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's encounter with Alasdair proves productive precisely because it is free from the kind of "benevolence" that characterizes all her other encounters. As Cooper argues,

> In the psychiatric institution the keepers exercise their power against the kept by means of the social processes of admission (involving baptism by diagnosis or at least classification as "dangerous to oneself" or "dangerous to others") [...]. Mind-colonizing power is further exercised by treatment with drugs aimed at reducing experience and producing obedience [...]. The keepers in the hospital, who have concentrated in themselves a generally inculcated social fear, fear their own madness and deal with it not by experiencing it but by controlling the madness of the kept. Also, and this is much more destructive, they envy the madness of the inmates insofar as this signifies some sort of breakthrough or liberation that they prohibit themselves, therefore *the envied madness of the other has to be eliminated* - if not, [...] society might come to pieces.[135]

While Cooper's allegation that the keepers' behaviour stems from an unacknowledged envy of the mad initially seems to contradict his earlier scepticism about the existence of a germ of truth buried within the behaviour labelled madness, he is referring here to the keepers' perceptions, not to an objective situation.

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's intensity of perception is cited as proof of megalomaniac delusions. As if in revenge, the psychiatrists reduce her to a two-dimensional case-study, who only experiences the experiences that they ascribe to her.

---

[133] Becker, Howard S., *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963), p. 9
[134] Maudsley, H., *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: Kegan Paul, 1874), p. 28
[135] *The Grammar of Living*, p. 59

Despite their apparent disapproval, Josephine's behaviour seems a source of fascination both to her mother and the Sister in the hospital. Foucault casts light on precisely this phenomenon where

> morality, in complicity with medicine, tried to defend itself against the dangers contained but insufficiently restricted by confinement [...]. Morality dreams of exorcising them, but there is something in man that makes him dream of experiencing them, or at least of approaching them and releasing their hallucinations.[136]

Josephine's response to her hospital room reveals the rapidity with which she has internalized the reactions deemed appropriate for someone of her "psychiatric" status. She marvels, with implied indebtedness, at 'this new world that I had just been given.'[137] This state of mind presages that defined by Cooper as the one where 'the victim gasps out "thank you" with the last breath of his life before returning to the Golgotha of The Normal Life to which he has been led [...] to submit.'[138] The promotion of dependency, where destructive gestures masquerade as benevolent ones, make Josephine doubt her ability to gauge her situation accurately. Thus passivity is reinforced, since resistance is hard to formulate against something whose existence is not only denied, but the *belief* in whose existence is cited as a symptom of the "illness" purportedly being cured.

If, as Laing argues, all interaction is to some extent an ontological battle, mental illness could be described as the label applied to the recognition of this fact. In *The Ha-Ha*, although Mrs. Traughton behaves as if her daughter were the focal point of her world, this phantom daughter diverges radically from the self-perceptions of the *actual* daughter. This diagnostic of the normalizing drive, its assumption of the pre-

---

136 *Madness and Civilization*, p. 207-8
137 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 9
138 *The Grammar of Living*, p. 144-5

existence of that which it seeks to promote, consolidates the double-bind and implicitly thwarts resistance. Szasz contends that

> All that is needed to succeed in the game of life is to "play a role" and gain social approval for it. Many parents still hold out this empty model as an ideal for their children to follow. When followed successfully, it leads to an "empty" life. When the child or young adult fails in this game, the outcome is often "neurosis" or "delinquency." But perhaps it is really only an attempt on the part of the struggling self to fill the void and become genuinely engaged in a game - in any "real" game. Being "mentally ill" or "psychotic" may be the only game left to play for such a person.[139]

This analysis illuminates the origins of Josephine's acquisition of the label "mentally ill." Her behaviour, which is partly an unconscious defence against her mother's intrusions, is invoked to justify the tactics employed by the hospital whose purpose is to invalidate the *protest* against such intrusions.

In *The Ha-Ha*, Dawson presents the rejection of what Szasz calls the "empty game" as a conscious choice. '"Play the game, Josephine," they would cry. "Keep the rules and you'll get well!" As if I wanted to get well for a game that was unreal from its inception.'[140] Josephine's challenge, explored throughout the novel, is to locate an alternative which leaves her autonomy uncompromised but at the same time keeps her free from psychiatric assault. *The Ha-Ha* poses the question of how far it is desirable to play, or pretend to be playing, the game in order to avoid the induced state of confusion as to whether one is playing it or not. Although Josephine deconstructs the *recommended* game, she finds it harder to construct an alternative course of action.

> Szasz contends that the term "mental illness" is a semantic pseudo-justification for game-promoting intrusions into the lives of people who reject the game. He defines it as a name given to "problems in living," which ought to be negotiated voluntarily by the individual, rather than "solved" coercively by employees

---

[139] *The Myth of Mental Illness*, p. 258
[140] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 155

of the state. More specifically, he argues that the term "schizophrenia" denotes a situation where 'not having a rule-giver he can respect, the young person becomes his own lawgiver.'[141] He pursues this line of reasoning by asserting that the paranoid delusion is only 'a *problem* to the patient's family, employer, and friends; to the patient, it is a *solution* to the problem of the meaning(lessness) of his life.'[142]

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's initial impression of her hospital room represents a fantasy of escape from a social world that confounds her, undermines her and finally explicitly rejects her.

> How well I remember that first night! It was all so clear then, as though I had woken after a dream to see a dazzling light on the ceiling, and had run out to find that thick snow had fallen in the night, and everything was changed and new; as though I was about to run laughing out into all that whiteness.[143]

'I had escaped from the other ward; I had escaped from the fowler's snare, had I not.'[144] However, the euphoria of release is displaced by the incipient realization that escape on alien terms is invalid by definition, since life cannot be lived in a vacuum. The choice is never simply between struggle or surrender, but must instead be an interstitial one, of inter- and intra-subjective negotiation.

Hidden behind the dazzling white snow of her first impressions is the reality of the triumph of the banal, of the "game that was unreal from its inception." 'A crack opened that took away the view, and left me helping to shake out the piles of dusty crêpe paper and tinsel, and pinning up the loops and bows and puffs that were our quota of ward decorations. These things seemed to have won their victory.'[145] While meaningless ritual and false joviality, a parody of "life outside," erode resistance through power's articulation in the form of the normalizing drive, force, in the form of

---

[141] *The Second Sin*, p. 102
[142] *The Second Sin*, p. 32
[143] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 21
[144] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 19

psychiatric assaults, weakens resistance in a more explicit way. 'For a long time, it seemed that it was every day for months, the operatives came with their needles and [...] rubber gags, and I had bad headaches afterwards and forgot where things were.'[146] '"Locked! The door's kept locked, dear!" they shouted as though I were deaf, and pushed me back up the ward, like a piece of furniture being shifted, while the older women came [...] to watch the spectacle of the stiff, jerking bodies being slid along the shiny lino.'[147] Significantly, it is the identifiability of these techniques, designed to enforce submission to the daily process of infantilization and reification, that precipitates Josephine's resistance, articulated in her declaration, '"I was born for something more than mere sanity."'[148] She tells the Sister,

> "You try to *keep* me in a world of my own! [...] You cherish me like a diseased person. Why not put a coloured ribbon in my hair and make me wear pinafores, as they do on the chronic wards? But I am real. I was born for joy [...], for love..." But I suppose I doubted it really, for I wept [...]. She stood there dully, neutrally, for a moment, as though I had insulted her race.[149]

This tirade illustrates how passivity is induced, for the persistent undermining of Josephine's position forces her into a retaliatory mode that amounts to nothing more than a rejection of the reality the Sister represents. In other words, she is confined to a debate that accommodates only dichotomization and in which shades of meaning have no place. Furthermore, the Sister's wounded countenance compounds the paralysis in the sense of guilt it provokes, since Josephine interprets the subtext of her hurt look as, "Why such hostility when, even after all I've been through, all I want is to *help*?" This response consolidates the deadlock, for Josephine's opposition to

---

[145] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 162
[146] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 154
[147] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 155
[148] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 128
[149] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 129

those who claim to want to help her is cast as synonymous with being in opposition to herself.

While only Josephine can define her own best interests, the event of having been admitted constitutes a forfeiting of this right. This is the context in which Frame, in *Faces in the Water*, infers from the psychiatric the sinister implications of the myth of benevolence that functions to camouflage coercion in the wider social world. '"For your own good" is a persuasive argument that will eventually make man agree to his own destruction.'[150] The view that scapegoats are not only "dealt with" for the common good but have brought their predicament on themselves is one that Arendt deconstructs as follows. 'Common sense reacted to the horrors of Buchenwald and Auschwitz with the plausible argument: "What crime must these people have committed that such things were done to them?"'[151] This response simultaneously vindicates the scapegoating majority (whether from explicit crimes or the guilt of Pontius Pilate) and consolidates the group by confirming a feeling of immunity in its components who feel secure in having committed no crime.

In the same way that Josephine's mother in *The Ha-Ha* refers to her as "the giggly one" whenever her reactions diverge from convention, the psychiatrists categorize her "scientifically" in order to perpetuate their control. University life seems equally mined, so that she feels in constant danger of making the wrong move, for fear of the symbolic punishment of belittlement. Therefore, despite her conveyor belt changes of scene, the underlying equation of the rules remains the same. Kate in Mercer's *In Two Minds* is equally at sea. 'People always seem to be living by rules I can't quite grasp.'[152] In this context, Cooper argues that 'the family form of social

---

150 *Faces in the Water*, p. 72
151 Arendt, H., *The Burden of Our Time* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), p. 418
152 *In Two Minds*, p. 67

existence that characterizes all our institutions essentially destroys autonomous initiative by its defining non-recognition of [...] the proper dialectic of solitude and being with other people.'[153]

Josephine again feels at the mercy of events when, having succumbed to the Sister's cajoling, she finds herself at Helena's party, a throwback to her university days. Her response to being mauled by a fellow guest confirms her sense of estrangement, which compounds her feeling of paralysis. '"It would be easier if I had some roller-skates," I muttered sadly, seeing that I would never dance. "Then you could just wheel me." [...]. Perhaps there was a specific purpose in the manœuvres. Perhaps the gentleman was an athlete, flexing and toning and so on.'[154] Her perception of herself as a prop is uncannily accurate, since she is clearly expected to conform to a plan about whose proposed outcome she has not been in on the consultation. When he praises the texture of her skin, she enquires without conscious irony, '"Is your father a taxidermist or something?"'[155] Her inability to decipher the subtext of his gestures reinforces her sense of alienation.

She remembers how the Sister, the Doctor and the social worker 'talked about getting back to the "real world" as though there were two; one good and one to be avoided.'[156] Yet this dichotomization on the part of her keepers is ironic, since their polarized categories illustrate the same underlying paradigm, the only difference being that in the hospital the coercion is overt. The process of categorizing and labelling the patients not only emphasizes the semantically constructed gulf that separates the mad from the sane, but also how proliferating banks of information seek to displace the self-perceived identities of those whom they purport to represent.

---

153 *The Death of the Family*, p. 150
154 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 86
155 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 86

Josephine's reduction to a "case for observation" is allegedly to help decide the most appropriate treatment, whose ostensible aim is "rehabilitation." However, in reality, this merely deepens (or, arguably, *produces*) the abyss *between* the patient and the wider social world. This process alienates her not only from the outside world but also from herself since, like her name, the information in her notes bears no relation to her self-perception. A further remove is thus created, whose purpose is to induce her to abandon her own experience so it can be replaced by the *sanitized* experience promoted by the normalizing drive.

When Josephine makes her vow to 'slip silently and secretly into the real world as though [she] had never been absent,'[157] she fails to consider that, after her lengthy sojourn in the hospital, she is less equipped than ever to survive there. At the party, as she stares transfixed at the 'mouths opening and shutting and thrusting sounds into the enormous gap,'[158] it dawns on her that, since "the real world" is not a spatial entity, a change of location neither signifies nor automatically presages "recovery." 'The past it seems was never over; the gulf was never bridged between then and now.'[159] A smooth transition is impossible, as not only can she never return to somewhere she has never been, but the concept of "the real world" is in itself a myth.

Not only is the hospital's purpose to dramatize her exclusion from "the real world," but the real world, the world of the group, is only *sustained* through its exclusions. Ironically, since the hospital staff refer to these two worlds of theirs as if they were separate entities, the only thing preventing Josephine's "return" is their sustained interference in her life.

---

156 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 22
157 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 68
158 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 77

Mystified by the disparity between their purported aims and their actual behaviour, Josephine struggles to formulate resistance. As Laing argues,

> *the more untenable a position is, the more difficult it is to get out of it*. This tautology is worth pondering upon [...]. In an alienated, untenable position, one does not realize this. Hence, it is impossible to get out. As soon as Paul realizes that he is in a box, he can try to get out of it. But since to *them* the box is *the whole world* to get out of the box is tantamount to stepping off the end of the world, a thing that no one who loves him could sit by and let happen.[160]

This scenario, which uncannily captures Josephine's predicament, illuminates the sinister reality that underlies the paternalistic spirit. Cooper defines madness as:

> The destructuring of the alienated structures of an existence and the restructuring of a less alienated way of being. The less alienated way of being is a more responsible way of being. Responsibility means answering with one's own voice, not with all the voices and their messages that have been planted in one's mind throughout one's history [...]. Alienation is the invasion of what we regard as our "selves."[161]

The democratized control of definitions of normality reveals the democratic principle as synonymous with the tyranny of the group. Those, like Josephine, whom these definitions fail to encompass, are scapegoated as dissenters and identified as targets for conversion. The pressure to conform to consensus opinion through the sustained power of suggestion is the usual way in which this is achieved, although psychiatric "treatment" converts power back into force if these social strategies should fail.

In *The Ha-Ha*, the intrusions of psychiatry estrange Josephine from herself both physically and psycho-semantically. She recalls that there were 'questions about my thoughts and my health and my way of life. For their statistics and bulletins, I supposed.'[162] This recollection implies that neither patients nor staff are deceived by the official line that "treatment" is the purpose of the psychiatric exchange. The

---

[159] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 95
[160] Laing, R. D., *Self and Others* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 41
[161] Cooper, D., "The Language of Madness," in *The Faber Book of Madness*, p. 282
[162] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 150

purpose is the publication of papers to validate the psychiatrists as "proper physicians" engaged in medical research. The patients are converted into specimens for analysis, to reinforce or modify medical hypotheses, while sporadically being "regraded" to reinforce the myth of treatment and cure.

Dawson shows how these regrading sessions are constantly invoked to blackmail the patients into complying with the psychiatrists' demands. Thus they serve a dual purpose, both subtly and overtly authenticating the hospital's existence. Not only is the patient's self-perception dissociated from the diagnosis, the disparity *between* these perceptions is seen to confirm the need for further treatment. Simultaneously, the hospital staff induce submission with veiled or open threats that the withholding of collusion will guarantee an unfavourable regrading. The carrot is the dubious prize of being "normalized," while the threat of lobotomy is the stick. Furthermore, as Foucault demonstrates, this atmosphere of surveillance is a chief diagnostic of micropolitical power, where the "patient," like the prisoner in the Panopticon, is constantly subject to the threat of observation. Psychiatry, he argues, is a factory for illness, since "illness" is constructed to generate psychiatric knowledge. Thus, while 'power relations imply relations of knowledge, the latter also presuppose the former.'[163]

When Josephine passes the room where 'the committee met, where the doctors had their case conferences and, I suppose, [...] regarded people and put them on trial,'[164] although the courtroom analogy encapsulates the imbalance of power, there is no pretence that the patients are innocent until they are proven guilty. Conversely, given that they have been psychiatrically hospitalized, their guilt is a foregone conclusion. They are neither charged with a crime nor judged by an impartial jury.

Their situation is Kafkaesque, since nothing is made clear, and their accusers deny being enemies but masquerade as those who are there "to help."

Since the rejection of "help" denotes mental illness, the objection that it is neither required nor desired is cited as confirmation of its necessity. The dice are further loaded against the patients by the fact that their accusers are also their judges and, as such, are far from being neutral.

Alice James's contention that 'one has a greater sense of intellectual degradation after an interview with a doctor than from any human experience'[165] contextualizes Josephine's sense of defilement as the full extent of her impotence dawns on her. Having been pronounced guilty on arrival, she finds her intellectual defences thwarted in advance. All her manœuvres merely entangle her further, since everything is viewed from the psychiatric perspective, which implicitly invalidates dissent.

The titles of the books on the shelves ('*Intra-cranial Tumours, Legal Aspects of Psychosis, Twenty Cases of Lobotomy*') [166] reveal the mania for classification indicative of the nature of the normalizing drive. This is the context in which Szasz argues that

> any classification, even a false one, promises hope of successful mastery; on the other hand, the lack of classification requires the admission of helplessness. This admission is a rare and highly sophisticated human achievement: it requires control of the incessant human striving for mastery, at least temporarily. This is a luxury that only those who feel secure enough to acknowledge their insecurity can afford. However difficult it may be to classify things and especially to classify them accurately, it is even more difficult not to classify things.[167]

---

[163] Kritzman, p. 83
[164] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 99
[165] James, A., *The Diary of Alice James*, ed. Leon Edel (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1964), p. 142
[166] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 100
[167] *Ideology and Insanity*, p. 198

It might be added that classifying *people* is an impulse even harder to resist. However, Szasz's analysis of the motivation for the compulsion to classify would be of little consolation to Josephine. Alasdair tries to reassure her, "'It's only *their* terminology, after all. It's only a word,"' and she remembers how

> the Sister had warned me not to be frightened of labels, but her injunctions had seemed irrelevant then. The world had seemed too real and too pressing for me to be bothered about labels. But now the books behind us had a sudden and ominous weight as though they might fall forward and suffocate me.'[168]

In the context of this implied threat, Nikolas Rose asserts that the tabulation process is more than its own reward. 'A new psychiatric epistemology can arise out of the material and technical conditions of the asylum itself: a range of troubles can become the object of a continuous diagnostic and systematizing gaze that construes them alike as evidencing psychopathology.'[169]

Boyne explores this phenomenon further when he argues that

> the techniques of filing, tabulation and notation' are 'basic to discipline [...]. The examination begets records; each individual becomes a case; the limit of describable individuality is lowered [...]. Individuals are documented, and these writings and files are *for use*'[170]

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's identity is eclipsed by her construction as a psychopathological entity, with her own perceptions recorded solely to illustrate the nature of her "delusions." Thus she is converted from an individual to be encountered and accepted to a problem to be deciphered and forcibly solved. The distinction between a person and a problem, as Josephine's responses testify, is that, unlike a problem, a person is not impervious to the attitudes it generates, or those that are projected onto it.

---

[168] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 103

[169] Rose, N., in Still, A. & I. Velody (eds.), *Rewriting the history of madness. Studies in Foucault's Histoire de la folie* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 145

[170] Boyne, R., *Foucault and Derrida. The other side of reason* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1990), p. 114

Penfield argues that 'it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action'[171] and, more aphoristically, Szasz asserts that 'looking for the organic etiology of mental illness is like looking for the calorific content of food for thought.'[172] This remark highlights the semantic confusion that defines the relationship between the psychiatric machine and the psychiatric patients who fuel it. Sass defines schizophrenia, with which Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* is diagnosed, as 'a heterogeneous and contested concept - one that has been used to cover a variety of different subtypes whose boundaries or essences are not now, and perhaps never will be, definitively established.'[173] This description, or non-description, is echoed more decisively by Szasz's contention that

> a psychiatrist who accepts as his "patient" a person who does not wish to be his patient [...] and proceeds to "treat" him against his will [...] creates "mental illness" and "mental patients." He does so in exactly the same way as the white man who sailed for Africa, captured the Negro, brought him to America in shackles, then sold him as if he were an animal, created slaves and slavery.[174]

The main distinction between these examples of category formation is what initially motivated them. While slaves, and their descendants, *became* the dumping sites for projection, this was not initially the purpose of the exercise. Like its decline, the introduction of slavery to the United States was motivated economically. The process of dehumanization reinforced rather than created the phenomenon, initially in order to justify slavery and later because the idea became established as a convenient social fact. In other words, the semantic (pseudo-)justification was largely retrospectively imposed. The construction of the category "mental illness" is more complex, as here the group's *psychic* rather than *actual* preservation is at stake. Scapegoats are

---

[171] Penfield, W., *The Mystery of the Mind*, quoted in Schumacher, E. F., *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Vintage, 1995)
[172] Szasz, T., *The Untamed Tongue* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1990), p. 131
[173] Sass, p. 15

therefore selected on the basis of what they "do" (or fail to do) rather than of what they "are" (or what they are seen to be). The semantic assumptions that inform their construction as a category thus precede the recruitment of individual scapegoats.

Clearly, however, the process by which Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* is maintained in her rôle as a psychiatric patient can only sustain its momentum in the context of the wider social discourse. Foucault argued that

> in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, circulation and functioning of a discourse.[175]

The normalizing discourse is self-consolidating. On the one hand, those social components who reproduce it thereby cement their group membership, while, on the other, scapegoat category construction conceptually formulates a group to which they can belong. Incited to feel they have a stake in its preservation, members of the social implicitly uphold it so that no external impetus is required. Because, as Foucault argues, power comes from everywhere and is therefore perpetually activated, its operations pervade and produce the social entity.

---

[174] *Ideology and Insanity*, p. 136

[175] Gordon, C., *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham & K. Soper (Hemel Hempstead: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1980), p. 93

Intimations Of Breakthrough

In *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine's resistance is eroded when she sees that 'a mental hospital is not an asylum or a sanctuary in the old-fashioned sense: it is just a roped-off side-street of modern existence, rife with as many contradictions, half-truths and lousy architecture as life itself.'[176] In the same context, Szasz emphasizes the social-psychiatric continuum in his contention that 'most people tacitly understand that the psychiatrist's job is to control deviance but pretend that he treats disease.'[177] However, as Foucault demonstrates, deviance control in the micropolitical age operates less through simple repression than through the production of consensus desires that reflect identification with the normalizing drive. Those perceived as estranged from this discourse are scapegoated and institutionalized to pre-empt potential subversion of the scapegoating majority's habits of thought.

Cousins and Hussain explore how modern formulations of power rely less on spectacle than panoptical techniques of surveillance. Micropolitical power, 'exercised regularly and evenly rather than in spectacular bursts of force,' not only renders its subjects 'the passive objects of knowledge'[178] but incites them to impose and transmit this knowledge they absorb both inter- and intra-subjectively. In *The Ha-Ha*, part of Josephine's "rehabilitation" is her placement cataloguing books. Here she applies the same strategies to the library as the psychiatric machine applies to the patients, a phenomenon dramatizing the hospital's microcosmic function from which the nature of the normalizing drive can be inferred.

Similarly, Kate, in Mercer's *In Two Minds*, is struck by intimations that a 'great big machine ... at the centre of the earth [...] controls everybody [...]. If I don't

---

[176] Krim, pp. 59-75

[177] Szasz, T., *A Lexicon of Lunacy* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 32

do what it wants, it'll kill me.'[179] The protagonist of Rhys's "Outside the Machine" experiences her condition in similar terms.

> The women in the beds bobbed up and down and in and out [...]. They had a strength, a certainty, because all their lives they had belonged to the machine and worked smoothly, in and out, just as they were told. Even if the machine got out of control, even if it went mad, they would still work in and out, just as they were told, whirling smoothly, faster and faster, to destruction.[180]

With Alasdair, Josephine envisages stepping outside the machine but, as she comes to realize, ultimately she can only rely on herself. After his unexplained departure, she recalls that 'everything seemed a long way off [...], the gardens had become stiff and straight and flat like a canvas'[181] seen 'through the wrong end of a telescope.'[182] This reaction prefigures the experience of the protagonist of Mortimer's *The Pumpkin Eater*, an exploration of breakthrough published the year after *The Ha-Ha.* 'I was irrationally convinced that she had come to give me some message from the outside world, but that like a rescue craft she had looked, seen nothing, and gone home.'[183]

Abandonment and betrayal, whether actual or perceived, compound the feeling of ontological annihilation. However, despite the difficulties Josephine is destined to encounter, the mood that imbues the end of *The Ha-Ha* presages Mitchison's question in her *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, also published in 1962: 'The more we explore, the more problems meet us. Yet would we have it otherwise?'[184] This acceptance of the inherent risks of "freedom" is conveyed metaphorically by the novelist Donleavy: 'Beware reaching for that little flower, its stem earthed to a buried electric cable to

---

[178] Cousins, M. & A. Hussain, *Michel Foucault* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1984), p. 173
[179] *In Two Minds*, p. 92
[180] *Tigers are Better Looking*, p. 82
[181] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 138
[182] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 139
[183] Mortimer, P., *The Pumpkin Eater* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 25
[184] Mitchison, N., *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (London: The Woman's Press, 1985), p. 16

send you flying clear across the grassy field. I reach out.'[185] In the same way,

Dawson's first novel ends on a paradoxically optimistic note.

> There *was* a form of contact. I could not deny that. Something had changed in me, and I could not neglect it [...]. It was irrevocable. Something drew me to my feet [...]. It was the need to keep alive, the need to hold on to what little reality there was, to keep within the ring that was people.[186]

However, Josephine's first intimations of "freedom" prove to be unsustainable. She lacks the techniques to negotiate the transition, and the doctors cite her behaviour as evidence of a relapse and thus as a justification for a renewal of their assaults. Yet Dawson implies that this inner chaos is necessary to counteract the effects of "hospital life." 'I did not mind what grade I was given in society, or whether I made the grade at all. I only wanted to keep alive [...]. It was worth anything to catch what little there was of existence and cling to it.'[187]

Josephine's behaviour, cited by the hospital as evidence of psychosis, signifies the stirrings of incipient recovery since, albeit as phantoms, people other than herself are starting to feature in her world. Dawson thus proposes an answer to the burning question at the heart of Green's *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*: '"Clear up my "symptoms" [...] ... *and what will I have then?*"'[188] At the end of Green's novel, the doctor utters the verdict paraphrased in the title (in answer to the question, '"And if I fight, then for *what*?"): "For nothing easy [...]. For your own challenge, for your own mistakes and the punishment for them, for your own definition of love and sanity - a good strong self with which to begin to live."'[189]

This perspective prefigures Josephine's recollection, 'I thought I wanted nothing more than that, an assurance [...] that I was alive, that I was not flying through

---

185 Donleavy, J. P., *The Saddest Summer of Samuel S* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 66
186 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 140
187 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 141-2
188 *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*, p. 20

unpeopled regions, through grey wastes of space.'[190] Although events eclipse the revelation that 'it all seemed to be part of the game that kept the lightness away,'[191] even the electric shocks administered back at the hospital fail to displace its residue.

Josephine oscillates in her retrospective interpretations of her fleeting experience of freedom. On the one hand, she realizes that 'something had changed; the breach between heaven and earth had suddenly been healed [...]. The colours broke out in radiance [..], and I knew that God was there.'[192] On the other, however, habit makes her doubt herself. 'It was not I [...]. That was all a misunderstanding. I was the one who sat here in the dayroom.'[193] Each aspect of this fractured "I" synergistically informs the narrative voice by which each is obliquely contained and through which the roots of the tension between them are explored. This narrative voice restores and reintegrates the spectrum of subject positions, conceptually juxtaposing them in simultaneous unity. Since vestiges remain of every inner experience, even back in the ward Josephine is fully aware that 'during that week in September, something had presented itself to my mind truly real, like land sighted from the sea [...]. I could shout across the disturbing world and someone would reply.'[194]

Venturing out from the safety of the ha-ha not only inspires her to demystify and deconstruct the roots and consequences of her mistrust, it also precipitates her latent anger at the invalidation of her life. She feels 'for the first time outraged,' and decides that 'it must have been Alasdair who gave me this anger. Perhaps he had

---

189 *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*, p. 183
190 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 143-4
191 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 145
192 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 159-60
193 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 164
194 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 165-6

bequeathed it instead of love.'[195] She experiences this rage as a mobilizing force; and love, for which can be read "connection," and which by definition lacks an object, comes to function as both its focus and its impetus.

However, Josephine's struggles are far from over. Her metaphor for existence, that of vertiginous absurdity, holds as true at the end of the novel as at its inception. Her breakthrough is realized not through a conversion but through an interstitial shift in perspective. She comes to see that life upside down on the ceiling need not necessarily be rejected. Ironically, the hospital's extreme techniques of constraint both distilled and focused this realization, implying that repression can activate resistance, just as resistance activates repression. Josephine's "breakdown" contains the seeds of her breakthrough, which leads her to question and reject her passivity. Joanna, in Dawson's second novel, fares less well because in *Fowler's Snare* the absence of any overt threat leads to a concomitant lack of the sense of urgency.

Conversely, Josephine comes to experience existence as something to live rather than something to which to submit. E. F. Schumacher defines this decision to take responsibility for one's life in the following terms. 'To ask whether the human being has freedom is like asking whether a man is a millionaire. He is not, but can become, a millionaire. He can make it his aim to become rich; similarly, he can make it his aim to become free.'[196] By the end of *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine has made the decision to strive towards autonomy. Whether this is attainable is less important than the fact that she makes the decision.

Friedenberg's ambiguous metaphor for psychiatric "cure" casts light on the dilemma at the heart of Josephine's choice. 'Many people find it pleasanter to dwell in

---

195 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 172
196 *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 40

a park than a dark forest, even though the forest was once their own.'[197] The challenge Josephine faces is to preserve and draw upon the psychic vestiges of the forest, while negotiating survival in the "pleasant park" of normalized social life. Although the forest ought not to be compromised, the park, if overrun, will avenge itself with a psychiatric deforestation programme. As Bessie Head contends in her novel *A Question of Power*, which explores the dynamic between breakdown and social coercion, power needs 'small, narrow, shut-in worlds' and feels insecure 'in the big, wide, flexible universe' where there are 'too many cross-currents of opposing thought.'[198]

The impasse of breakdown, as a self-defeating, solipsistic self-apotheosis of the mind, is displaced, at the close of *The Ha-Ha*, by the urge to reclaim experience through inter- and intra-subjective dialogue. In his introduction to *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault describes madness as 'a form of vision that destroys itself by its [...] choice of oblivion in the face of existing forms of social [...] strategy.'[199] Having made freedom her aim, Josephine must seek to retain her vision, but translate it into a form that resists oblivion in the face of the forces ranged against it.

---

[197] Friedenberg, p. 61
[198] Head, B., *A Question of Power* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1974), p. 35
[199] *Madness and Civilization*, p. vii

Fowler's Snare

The Divided Self: The Tension Between Collusion And Resistance

In *Fowler's Snare* Joanna attempts to resist the normalizing drive embodied by David and the deadlock represented by her parents' marriage by drifting into "bohemianism" with Bric and an equally abortive flirtation with "the church." The systematic divergence of her internalization of consensus expectations and her feeling of estrangement from this internalization produces a sense of paralysis, since every attempt to elude constraint culminates in its consolidation. Because she fails to negotiate an interstitial perspective and deconstruct the substructural paradigm of constraint, the discourse of the *status quo* insinuates itself into the realms of its potential subversion. This tendency of counter-dialects to structurally replicate the grammar of the discourse to which they purport to be opposed is a defining theme of *Fowler's Snare* and one developed in greater depth in Dawson's later fiction.

Joanna And David: The Internalization of "Consensus"

Dawson's fiction examines the effects on her protagonists of power's articulation as the normalizing drive, not least in its internalized manifestations. In *Fowler's Snare*, the overlapping dialects of the normalizing discourse present existence as a series of preordained chronological steps, the avoidance, or transformation, of which is constructed as inconceivable.

The novel presents Joanna at the end of her formal "education," and thus at a temporal interstitial point, whose liberatory potential is blocked by the mutually-consolidating dialects of micropolitical normalization. Power, in Foucauldian terms, is by definition an abstraction. However, its dynamic charge is harnessed by the *status quo* to promote and perpetuate homogeneity, to bind and consolidate the group. Despite a veneer of diversity, every character and structure Joanna encounters exerts the same pressure to submit to the pacifying myth of inevitability.

Unlike *The Ha-Ha*, Dawson's first novel, set in a psychiatric institution where Josephine's freedom is curtailed by the use of force, the normalizing drive in *Fowler's Snare* operates in more insidious ways. Foucault argued that 'the more that people are free in respect to each other, the greater the temptation on both sides to determine the conduct of others.'[1] On the cusp of "adulthood," and not identifiably constrained, Joanna initially appears to be "free " yet paradoxically, this excess of ostensible freedom produces a state of psychic paralysis and raises questions about what freedom really means. The novel explores her growing conviction that the only real choice is that between a range of socially sanctioned brands of constraint, all of which articulate the same underlying paradigm. While, as Foucault put it, an institution is only stable

---

[1] *The Final Foucault*, p. 20

when 'sanctioned by public opinion,'[2] public opinion is in itself an institution, its stability is inherent, self-producing and self-produced. Throughout *Fowler's Snare*, as the title suggests, Joanna's internalization of "consensus" means that her struggles compound her entanglement, resistance being blocked by collusion. For as a Foucauldian self-policing subject, constrained by an internalized conceptual *status quo*, she is governed by 'a tribunal in permanent session.'[3]

Although David, Joanna's "partner," portrays himself as beset by anxieties, he seems at ease with the conceptual conveyor-belt beneath him. '"You needn't worry," his hand came down on her shoulder [...], "when we are nine-to-fivers. Only another three months of very precious liberty left [...] and then we won't be spectators anymore."'[4] This exchange is a synecdoche and a precursor of the way that their "relationship" unfolds. By establishing the situation, his attempt at reassurance produces the opposite effect. Not only is "liberty" implicitly invalidated by his nonchalant reduction of it to a cliché but, ironically, the prospect of the *loss* of spectator status is precisely the source of Joanna's alarm.

Unlike Josephine, her fictional predecessor in *The Ha-Ha*, her behaviour is subject to implied rather than actual formulations of control. As Chomsky contends, successful intimidation renders unnecessary the actual use of force.[5] Furthermore, where possible, force is avoided by the normalizing drive since, by exposing the procedures of normalization, the application of violence potentially activates resistance. Unable to identify the source of her constraint, Joanna is denied an

---

[2] Gordon, C. & P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 166

[3] *Madness and Civilization*, p. 265

[4] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 7

[5] *Deterring Democracy*, p. 271

interstitial locus from which to deconstruct the social discourse. Thus it seems to her that any attempt at resistance only results in a tightening of the snare.

Although, in common with most of Dawson's characters, David is seldom consciously malign, he cannot conceive of preoccupations which are distinct from his own. Since he embodies paternalism, the redefinition of Joanna's experience is a condition of his negligible "support." 'He loved her whimsy. You ask for water because you are dying of thirst, and all you get is feathers, or ash, or rust.'[6] His dismissal of her anguish as a quirk to be casually indulged is such an ontologically annihilating act that the authorial voice intervenes to introduce the defining theme of the novel. The shift to the second person grammatically encapsulates the way in which his attitude estranges her from herself. His offhand dismissal of her echoes his conceptually annihilating reference to freedom, both of which he reduces to phantoms.

Laing argues that, while people hope to share the experience of a relationship, 'the only honest beginning, or even end, may be to share the experience of its absence.'[7] This is the context in which Szasz contends that people '"in love" share the mistaken belief that they live in the same world. They come to "love" one another when they acknowledge that they live in different worlds, but are prepared, once in a while, to cross the chasm that separates them.'[8] David in *Fowler's Snare* never considers taking this conceptual leap, as he is unaware that one exists to be taken. Instead, he views her as endearingly aberrant, but always with the assumption that, with his help, she will soon be part of the fold and "normalized." While he never explicitly invalidates Joanna's views, his attitude, like that of Mrs. Traughton in *The*

---

[6] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 10
[7] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 48
[8] *The Untamed Tongue*, p. 92

Ha-Ha, merely confirms a fictitious individual, at radical odds with Joanna's self-perception.

While, in *The Ha-Ha*, Josephine withdraws and is forcibly withdrawn from the charade, the constraints in Dawson's second novel are harder to define. Here there are no hospital walls to segregate the "mad" from the "sane" and neither does the label "mentally ill" render the invalidation explicit. This is the context in which Cooper's fantasy of 'desert areas in the metropolis where people [could] scream without interference'[9] informs the world of the novel, the relevance of anti-psychiatry being its emphasis on a discursive continuum, where the symptoms referred to as mental illness are freed from the confines of psychiatric theory. As Cooper argues, '*anti-psychiatry tries to reduce the rules of the psychiatric game as a prelude to stopping such games.*'[10]

In *Fowler's Snare*, Joanna's sense of estrangement is less attributable to the unacceptability of screaming as to the fact that no one understands why she might want to. This is the context in which Goffman contends that 'the point is not that the hospital is a hateful place for patients but that for the patient to express hatred of it is to give evidence that his place in it is justified.'[11] The hospital thus functions as an extreme manifestation of the tyranny of the *status quo*, by which Joanna feels oppressed but with which, by default, she colludes. Her lack of an interstitial vantage point prevents her from formulating *why* she wants to scream.

Anti-psychiatry, as represented by Cooper, is motivated by the need to absolve itself from its origins. However, while psychiatry's function is to suppress screams of protest and dissent, the ascendancy of the discourse of psychoanalysis denotes a shift

---

[9] *The Death of the Family*, p.143
[10] *The Grammar of Living*, p. 56

to the pre-emptive dissolution of the very *desire* to scream. This transition microcosmically encapsulates the move from the prohibitive manifestations of force to the dynamic and generative operations of micropolitical power. Conversely, anti-psychiatry seeks to hold a microphone to the scream, to explore the possibility of its contextual intelligibility.

Foucault's analysis of the consolidation of power through the process of micropolitical panopticization, where 'chains and manacles' are exchanged 'for moral constraints,'[12] is relevant to Dawson's transition from exploring the experience of Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* to that of Joanna in *Fowler's Snare*. For Foucault demystified the apparent increase of leniency as 'a ruse of power, allowing a more extensive form of control to take hold.' Thus, ostensible change is 'at best the "incidental music" which accompanies change [...], at worst, a euphemistic covering device for the new forms of power.'[13] This is the context in which Fromm maintains that an individual can 'be a slave without chains' because

> the outer chains have simply been put inside [...]. The desires and thoughts that the suggestion-apparatus of society fills him with, chain him more thoroughly than outer chains. This is because man can at least be aware of outer chains but be unaware of inner chains, carrying them with the illusion that he is free. He can try to overthrow the outer chains, but how can he rid himself of chains of whose existence he is unaware?[14]

Although Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* is aware of constraint, she fails to consider that she has collusively internalized the very preconceptions by which she feels constrained. Thus, she misconstrues everyone she encounters as either an oppressor or a vehicle of potential salvation, unaware that in the context of her passivity those who initially appear to be the latter ultimately come to resemble the former.

---

[11] *Asylums*, p. 335
[12] Cousins & Hussain, p. 133
[13] R. McGowan, "Power & Humanity, or Foucault among the historians," in Jones & Porter, p. 101

David's function in the novel reformulates that of the hospital in *The Ha-Ha*, the restraints he embodies being sufficiently overt to permit the possibility of resistance. Conversely, Joanna's alternative liaisons produce a paralysis that stems from her uncertainty about what it is by which she feels constrained. These entanglements, ostensibly freely chosen, embody the nature of the wider social world, whereas David, like the hospital, represents an extreme situation. However, as the novel reveals, extreme situations are not *qualitatively* distinct from "normal" ones. As Kirsner argues, they 'reveal the inner nature of their normal situations by placing [people] into positions in which they can no longer hide the truth from themselves. They reveal the logic of everyday life which is normally truncated and mystified.'[15] Thus Joanna's escape from David obscures "the truth" that normalizing ontological invasions have the same substructural format whether they operate within the mainstream world or within what masquerades as an alternative existence.

"'It's just a law of nature, Jan. Necessity,'" David says. "'One adapts [...], or else one dies. That's the first law of survival.'"[16] This is the context in which Pressburger conveys the dilemma at the heart of adaptation. "'Man can get used to anything." To be frank, I have never known whether one should consider this characteristic "a good thing" or humanity's major defect.'[17] Clearly the answer to some extent depends on the emphasis placed on the *quality* of survival.

Joanna's sense of suffocation in the aftermath of David's assertion is something she can articulate and attribute directly to its smug and self-satisfied certainty, to which she feels unable to relate. 'It was as though a plug or a stopper had

---

[14] Fromm, E., *The Art of Being* (London: Constable & Co., 1997), p. 7
[15] *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre and R. D. Laing*, p. 21
[16] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 11
[17] Pressburger, G., "Teeth," in *The Body* (London: Granta Publications Ltd., Spring 1992), p. 169

been neatly inserted into her life.'[18] Unlike David, who calmly surveys a series of snares, his current one being Finals, stretching not unbeguilingly into the future, Joanna is unable to 'communicate hers.'[19] However, despite her awareness that he is the transmission wire for her feelings of constraint, she is unaware that she is simultaneously projecting them onto him. The fact that he symbolizes a perpetual intensification of constraint focuses her awareness of the phenomenon, a focus which, in his absence, dissolves into inarticulacy and a non-specific sense of alienation. David has absorbed, and now embodies and transmits, the normalizing drive of the social, dramatizing Ransom's contention that 'the subjective *desire* to achieve superior status is a far more effective impetus [...] than the coercion associated with punishments.'[20] Ironically, David's behaviour is partly motivated by the desire to ensnare a woman like Joanna, the incommunicability of whose reservations merely serves to confirm his certainty. This sense of the incommunicability of her thoughts both expresses and compounds her sense of paralysis. As De Quincey wrote in

Confessions of an English Opium Eater,

> if in this world there is one misery having no relief, it is the pressure on the heart from the *Incommunicable*. And if another sphinx should arise to propose another enigma to man - saying, What burden is that which only is insupportable by human fortitude? I should answer at once - *It is the burden of the Incommunicable.*[21]

Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* is 'dismayed at the kind of finality with which [David]

spoke, at the kind of finality that had come into their relationship; the world that they shared had become a neatly taped one in which she could only play a certain rôle.'[22]

---

[18] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 12
[19] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 16
[20] Ransom, J. S., *Foucault's Discipline* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 51
[21] De Quincey, T., *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994), p. 111
[22] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 17

Not only does her dismay resist articulation, its incommunicability makes it all the more intense.

De Tocqueville contends that 'the ruler no longer says: You must think as I do or die. He says: You are free not to think as I do [...], but from this day on you are a stranger among us.'[23] While Szasz and others argue that modern forms of scapegoating invert exclusion, replacing it with attempts at normalization, the underlying paradigm remains in place, as dramatized by David's attitudes in *Fowler's Snare*. Unlike Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, Joanna is never officially identified as "a stranger" because she has, to some extent, internalized the notion of consensus. Szasz contends that since to see the world differently from the way in which it is seen, or purportedly seen, by the group 'threatens us with solitude,' while to *say* that we see it differently 'threatens us with ostracism,' hypocrisy 'is the homage' paid by intellect to custom.[24] While Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* has no aptitude for paying such a homage, Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* is entangled in the collusive dynamic and tormented by the awareness of her connivance.

Whereas David, who needs a plan, is mobilized by its enactment, Joanna's defining attribute is her dread of plans and all that they imply. Smart proposes that far more pressing than the elimination of contingency is 'the constitution of the conditions in which it becomes possible for people to exercise self-determination in the face of contingency.'[25] However, in Joanna's world, such conditions are not only not forthcoming, but are never even hypothetically conceptualized. Whereas the hospital's function in *The Ha-Ha* was to enforce the adaptation of the "maladapted,"

---

[23] De Tocqueville, A., *Democracy in America*, quoted in Adorno, T. & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London & New York: Verso, 1992), p. 133
[24] Szasz, T., *The Manufacture of Madness* (St Albans & London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1977), p. 86
[25] Smart, B., *Postmodernity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 95

or of those incapable of feigning "adaptedness," the wider world of *Fowler's Snare* is characterized by a 'new regime of control' which is 'minimalist in its approach' but 'more far-reaching [...] in its effect.'[26] Adaptation is seldom referred to since, outside institutions, the assumption prevails that "common sense" renders it such a reflex that the need for it is not so much denied as not even considered. Joanna's friend Ruth's declaration that ""What can't be cured must be endured"" takes David's outlook into the realm of conscious platitude. The flicker of revolt in Joanna's response, ""I think it's the other way round,""[27] instantly fades when she sees how at a loss she is to *enact* such hypothetical resistance. The fact that David's mechanical approach to life is manifested even in the realm of "physical love" calls into question the status of "sexuality" as a site of potential subversion. While he imagines himself to love her, Beckett, for one, harboured doubts about whether acts 'can ever be of love, or love survive in acts.'[28] The gloom of carnal custom synecdochally encapsulates the ontological nature of the fowler's snare.

> So that was kissing. That was love, was it? Joanna wondered whether he would conceive his children like that, in little bangs and starts and awkward thrusts; she wondered whether Dike and Dora had [begotten] *her* like that, with a little apology at the end for life's continuing and repeating itself through these little spurts and bursts, more hunger and embarrassment than love.[29]

Joanna's existential paralysis is compounded by the fact that, unlike Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, she is impervious to the intimations of potential poetry latent within hunger and embarrassment. Not only does every aspect of her life conceptually replicate every other, but each generation seems to pursue the same habitualized manœuvres which they misconstrue as spontaneity. Pirie remarks with irony that if

---

[26] Hekman, p. 213
[27] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 57
[28] Beckett, S., *Murphy* (London: Calder Publications, 1993), p. 124

people can have any colour provided it is black, it is hard to know if they would prefer to choose another colour.[30] In the same vein, Ransom contends that 'the best way to control the range [...] of options open [...] is to turn [...] key prerequisites into accepted and, finally, unquestioned ways of thinking.'[31] Whenever Joanna glimpses what appears to be an alternative, it gradually reveals itself as another manifestation of the same underlying paradigm. This phenomenon is elucidated by Foucault's theory that a prerequisite of resistance is to demystify the underlying equation of constraint, which will otherwise inevitably reassert itself. In other words, the Foucauldian caveat that informs Dawson's fiction is that emphasis on content at the expense of form merely results in a reformulation of that which is ostensibly being subverted. However, as Dawson's novels reveal and as his work illustrates, form can best be inferred and identified from an examination of the content through which it manifests itself.

Joanna's life in *Fowler's Snare* is portrayed as so pre-programmed that she experiences the normalizing drive in the form of an internalized puppeteer. This phenomenon is symbolically conveyed by her preoccupation with the circus dogs whose Pavlovian antics are, ironically, meant to provide escapist entertainment for the audience, whose lives are in fact reflected in this well-rehearsed charade.

> They were supposed to jump through the hoop [...]. But though they all jumped when the ringmaster cracked his whip and cried "Take it away!" only two of them ever got anywhere near the hoop. The rest went on making tiny leaps and spurts and jumps with pleased grins on their panting, salivating jaws, going through all the motions of being the jolliest dancing dogs in the Home Counties, without the smallest realisation that they had not made the hoop.[32]

---

[29] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 37

[30] Pirie, M., *Micropolitics* (Aldershot: Wildwood House Ltd., 1988), p. 223

[31] Ransom, pp. 131-2

[32] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 80-1

For David, in particular, the very act of jumping, a reflex reminiscent of his carnal manœuvres, functions as its own reward, semi-consciously enhanced by the anticipation of approval. However, even Ruth discerns that the machinations of their lives are metaphorically encapsulated by the circus act. "'It's too near the bone [...]. We are just like those dogs. We don't manage to get anywhere near the hoops but we go on prancing and hopping to the music just the same.'"[33] Joanna's obsession with the significance of the dogs' performance confirms their act as the novel's central image, for they have so internalized prescribed behaviour that the ringmaster's whip seems superfluous. Their jumps have become voluntary.

In *The Ha-Ha*, the image of the flies traversing the ceiling encapsulates the theme of ontological absurdity in whose context Josephine's tendency to veer between panic, paralysis and mirth is portrayed as contextually intelligible. Her predicament is illuminated by the Laingian credo that from disturbed, or disturbing, behaviour can be inferred the disturbing demands that are *made* on individuals. Paraphrasing Laing, Howarth-Williams aphoristically contends that to regard the gambits of "the disturbed" as primarily attributable 'to some psychological deficit is [...] like supposing that a man doing a handstand on a bicycle on a tightrope [...] with no safety net is suffering from an inability to stand on his own two feet.'[34] Josephine's anguish in *The Ha-Ha*, however, is attributable less to her actual predicament than to the universal insistence that the journey has a purpose, that the ceiling is the floor and that to question either premise is an indisputable sign of mental illness.

The symbolic journey of the flies that underpins *The Ha-Ha* evolves in *Fowler's Snare* into a sinister animation, where the pressure to conform to a specific

---

[33] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 80-1
[34] Howarth-Williams, p. 66

and synchronized performance displaces the original premise that the only rule is to refrain from comment. Because the hospital provided a space for Josephine to consider the implications of her journey, *The Ha-Ha*, viewed in retrospect, is a paradoxically optimistic novel. The journey emerges as a dynamic, where perspective can colour as well as be coloured by the scenery, and where direction matters less than the motives for making the choice. Conversely, in *Fowler's Snare* each attempt at breakthrough is stillborn. Whereas the flies in *The Ha-Ha* are merely expected to advance until they reach the edge of the ceiling, in Dawson's second novel the dogs appear to delight in their contortions. The urgent crack of the internalized whip blocks the interstitial potential for Joanna to conceive of shifting her focus from "changing her life" to deconstructing her complicity in it and transforming her habit of acquiescence. Denied the enforced leisure and the resulting sense of urgency that accompany defeat, Joanna fails to consider the implications of the generative nature of the normalizing drive. Side-tracked by all that the ringmaster embodies, she perceives constraint as externally applied, and thus expects salvation to proceed from an external source as well. Whereas *The Ha-Ha* poses the conundrum of how to demystify and negotiate existence, *Fowler's Snare* focuses on the mechanics of the actual manœuvres, which Joanna sees as unavoidable. The dogs become such an obsession that

> everything reminded her of them [...]. The eternal opening and shutting, and the dogs hopping up and down, knocked against her mind, emptily and obsessively [...]. One had to go on hopping and jumping regardless of whether one was anywhere near the hoop. She supposed she had been begotten in this way. She supposed that David would beget his children in this way. There must be such a thing as passion [...]. But she could only think of the thudding of the dogs' paws in the circus ring, and the small mechanical claps and bangs that seemed to comprise experience.[35]

---

[35] Howarth-Williams, p. 66

Joanna's analogy between these eager, frantic leaps and the perpetuation of the species blurs the distinction between content and form and presents her predicament as inescapable. Not only is existence reduced to a series of futile moves, but the very *fact* of existence seems to result from its mode of begetting. The point at which a phenomenon is perceived as being hereditary is the point at which it ceases to be open to debate.

To Joanna, David seems 'a long way away' as he analyses 'the Fear of Freedom in terms of Juvenile crime.'[36] The capital letters intensify the reduction of concepts to clichés, invoked more for purposes of complacent self-validation than from any desire to try to understand them. Dawson implies an inverse correlation between purported resolve and authenticity of intent, as illustrated when Joanna joins the London Voluntary Labour Team because she wants 'a free holiday in the summer' whereas David, we are told, cares 'passionately about the welfare of the deprived, the underprivileged and the old.' Yet she flinches inwardly when he refers to the Clactons as '"the old people" as though they were a species of woolly sheep,'[37] his condescending paternalism revealed in his perception of them as an anonymous entity, fortunate to have a benefactor such as himself. He regards them as one-dimensional, as he does Joanna, as if they exist solely to fulfil a function in his life, featuring in his perceptions only as beneficiaries of his goodwill. The source of David's compulsion to classify is that if he accepted the landscape as shifting and unknowable, the comfort he derives from planning would have to be forsworn. Even his words seem designed

---

[36] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 9
[37] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 13

not to convey reality, but rather to keep it at bay. '"Good old Salinger"' he says. '"Different levels of reality." She winced as he killed off Salinger.'[38]

As a vehicle of the normalizing drive, he sees Joanna's reduction to a single reality level as a foregone conclusion, as if his confidence in her ultimate conversion will render it a self-fulfilling prophecy. This conviction is illustrated by the Chinese proverb he invokes, waiting for her 'to see the significance of the dripping tap. "If it goes on dripping for long enough it will wear even a stone away."

"I suppose so,"' she replies, 'thinking that she might be a stone. Then more vehemently [...]: "But I am not a stone."'[39] This exchange encapsulates not only her resistance to his imposed definitions, but the insidious nature of their imposition.

Paraphrasing the Nietzschean verdict, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that 'you will know nothing through concepts unless you have first created them.'[40] Yet since David in *Fowler's Snare* only wants to consolidate, not to understand, he is content to have inherited the concepts he invokes. Laing argues that

> once certain fundamental structures of experience are shared, they come to be experienced as objective entities. These reified projections [...] are then introjected. By the time sociologists study these projected-introjected reifications, they have taken on the appearance of things. They are not things ontologically. But they are pseudo-things [...]. They take on the force and character of partial autonomous realities, with their own way of life. A social norm may come to impose an oppressive obligation on everyone, although few people feel it to be their own.[41]

David's perceptions, like those of Mrs. Traughton in *The Ha-Ha*, so reflect his internalization of consensus that he experiences them as spontaneous and independently arising. His behaviour is illuminated by the Foucauldian doctrine that

---

[38] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 34
[39] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 39
[40] Deleuze, G. & F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, trans. by G. Burchell & H. Tomlinson (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 7
[41] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 65

each component of the social micropolitically absorbs and transmits the discourse of the *status quo*. The messages he has inherited, he recites as self-evident truths, this being the way that prescribed modes of existence perpetually consolidate themselves.

This is the context of the Laingian distinction between praxis and process; praxis referring to 'events, occurrences, happenings [...], deeds done by doers,' and process to continuous operations that may have 'no agent as their author.'[42] Foucault's contention, which casts light on the ontological struggles of Dawson's protagonists, is that the consolidation of power manifests itself as a syncretic transition from praxis to process, a diachronic shift from the prohibitive and the dynastic to the generative and dynamic charge of micropolitical power. In other words, as Laing contends, the charged nature of social interaction may become so divorced from the conscious intentionality of any of the members of the group that 'no one may even realize what is happening.'[43] Thus the impact of David's attitudes on Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* becomes intelligible where process and praxis intersect.

Joanna sees David as belonging 'to the world of facts,' as he knows about 'population figures, capitals and racial minorities,'[44] a perception of him that emphasizes his failure to distinguish between what constitutes a fact and what a human being. "Racial minorities," like "the old people," are classified as homogenous, inert and peripheral parts of his landscape, rather than as dynamic and multiplicitous entities, moving through it and constituting it, just as he moves through theirs.

---

[42] *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, p. 22
[43] *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, p. 22
[44] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 29

Fowler's Snare seems permeated by intimations of impending defeat because the social, embodied by David, so erodes Joanna's resistance that she comes to doubt its validity even as an idea, and sees the only choice as the one between conversion and withdrawal. While David is oblivious to her sense of estrangement from the world he represents, Dawson portrays her will to participate as systematically diminishing in direct proportion to the intensity of the gusto with which he invests his own performance. After the dancing, they stand there 'vacantly. What to do next?'[45] and when the piano is silent, there is 'again that nothing,'[46] a "nothing" of whose existence only Joanna seems aware, like the even-toed ungulates in *The Ha-Ha*, which nobody but Josephine could see. The distinction, however, is that, unlike Josephine's hallucinations which delight her because they symbolize the primacy of the arbitrary, Joanna's sensations bring a feeling of desolation as they reflect the myth of inevitability and dramatize the fowler's snare.

David so resembles 'a sad guinea-pig with his hair brushed back from his eyes like that' that she finds she no longer wants to laugh. 'The joke was too monstrous. This was life [...]. She had got involved in a terrible manifestation of life [...]. Was this really all there was?'[47] The apparent inevitability of these modes of conduct is intensified by her awareness that her parents dramatize the same dynamic. While her mother retreats into forced joviality, her father simply withdraws. Joanna feels oppressed by 'the amount of effort her mother put into pleasure' and wishes that 'Dora would not use idiom. Her [...] gestures of vitality never sounded right - slightly

---

[45] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 32
[46] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 33
[47] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 37

odd and inappropriate, as though she had dressed up in costume.'[48] Yet her father's tactics, although less mystifying, are equally representative of deadlock. 'All his energy had been dedicated, like a struggle with a sea-wall that leaked, to keeping his identity preserved.'[49] 'His whole life was redirected [...] to keeping himself intact against the disintegrating action of Dora's cold eye.'[50] Laing argues that

> a man can estrange himself by mystifying himself and others. He can also have what he does stolen from him by the agency of others [...]. Men can and do destroy the humanity of other men, and the condition of this possibility is that we are interdependent. We are not self-contained nomads producing no effect on others except our own reflection.[51]

The source of Joanna's longing to be self-contained is her unease with the ontological wars of attrition that characterize the social and its intersecting microcosmic units. However, unlike Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* who is simply perplexed, since the intersection of her temperament and her circumstances means that collusion is less of an option, Joanna feels oppressed by the behaviour and attitudes of everyone who represents the normalizing drive. This distinction is dramatized by the ways in which Josephine and Joanna react to their mothers.

In *The Ha-Ha*, the hospital's explicit applications of constraint pose less of an ontological threat than the micropolitical dialects of normalizing power that construct, traverse and activate the social. By extension, Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* feels less open to invasion by her father's identifiable modes of attempted self-preservation than she does by her mother's more mystifying ones. Although she appreciates that neither evasion nor frenetic activity constitutes a viable means of resistance, she is more on her guard against replicating the diversionary tactics enacted by her mother. Although

---

[48] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 24
[49] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 40
[50] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 41
[51] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 25

Dora deludes herself that her life is fulfilling and purposeful, Joanna discerns an emptiness suffusing the rituals that her mother and her coterie obsessively perform. Although aware that it is only Dora's snippets of information that give her 'her cards of identity,'[52] Joanna's rejection of such conditions of acceptance tightens the deadlock of evasion represented by her father, who channels all his energies into pre-emptive self-defence. *Fowler's Snare* explores the self-defeating nature of resistance that operates only at the level of content and fails to engage with the structure of constraint. This is conveyed when Joanna's rejection of her mother's approach leads her to replicate her father's retreat into a self-referential world.

Undeterred by Joanna's lack of response, David's tongue 'shot out jerkily and hit her lip as it searched for her mouth,'[53] an image that encapsulates the indifference, self-interest and amateurishness of his general attitude to her. Joanna's reaction confirms her divergence from Josephine, her fictional predecessor. For, unlike Josephine whose fundamental perplexity precludes connivance, Joanna's semi-conscious counter-mystification, seeking to counter David's implied indifference with an exaggerated indifference of her own, represents her collusion in the dynamic. She finds she responds 'mechanically - it seemed such a long way for him to come, especially as there was nothing.'[54] Her mind goes on 'chanting wilfully: "Je tire, tu tires, il tire ..." still feeling the kiss that had been fired at her, the harsh explosion against her cheek.'[55]

Sass contends that 'reifying, distancing, often self-alienating processes' tend to define the "schizophrenic personality" that perceives experience in 'mechanistic

---

[52] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 89
[53] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 36
[54] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 22
[55] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 26

terms.'[56] The fact that Joanna's inner voice chants *wilfully* distinguishes her from Josephine who merely feels the wistfulness of estrangement when regarding those who seem to know the codes. Joanna, on the other hand, consciously contrives her sense of disengagement to preserve herself from being engulfed by people like David who are keen to recruit her as a member of their world. However, the source of her anguish is the tension between the desire to be self-contained and her insight, which she can only partially deny, that 'the occupational risk of professional chastity' is 'something egotistic, insensitive and untruthful.'[57]

While Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* sporadically and without success tries to find a way into a world that excludes her, Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* seeks to hold herself aloof from a world that seems avid to engulf her. In each case, however, the protagonist's self-perception, which consists primarily of the resolve to resist an imposed identity, diverges radically from the perception that others have of her. The sense of self-estrangement that reveals and is revealed by the awareness of this dichotomy is thus systematically reinforced.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault observes that the word *delirium*, 'a general definition of classical madness,' derives from '*lira*, a furrow, so that *deliro* actually means to move out of the furrow, away from the proper path of reason.'[58] Dawson's protagonists can construct the potential for breakthrough only by rejecting the false solution of resistance enacted as direct inversion. Instead they must orchestrate an interstitial shift in perspective, a moving out of the furrow forged by the normalizing drive which annexes "reason" to validate and consolidate itself. However, the more Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* tries to elude the furrow of life with

---

[56] Sass, p. 95
[57] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 118

David, the more constrained she feels and the more convinced that Dike and Dora's brand of "union" is a universal and therefore an inevitable one. Like Thomas Bernhard's deadlocked duo in *The Lime Works*, her parents are trapped in an unbearable life, but 'if they did not simulate bearability, its unbearableness could simply not be borne.'[59] As Laing contends, 'it is not enough to destroy one's own and other people's experience. One must overlay this devastation with a false consciousness inured, as Marcuse puts it, to its own falsity.'[60] Dike and Dora's false identities having congealed around them, the infiltration of routine, embraced to ease the simulation of bearability, has displaced them from the centre of themselves. They seem to Joanna to have insulated themselves against the potential for change. '"Nothing like a storm ever comes here,"' she observes. '"There are too many houses and television aerials. They break it up before it ever arrives."'[61] This thirst for a storm, a symbolic projection of her horror of stagnation, further manifests itself in her desperation to think of 'something to say; something wild and improbable [...] to tax David's credulity; something to shake him and shock him; something that would break the pattern that was reforming around them.'[62] This urge, however, is misdirected since its motivation is to shock and shake *David*, rather than to shock and shake herself. Moreover, his quizzical attitude to her, symptomatic of his delusions of universality, thwarts at its inception her longing to break the deadlock, as the television aerials do the storm. The metaphor posits an implicit analogy. One the one hand, each of the houses is connected to a finite number of channels, existing to

---

[58] *Madness and Civilization*, p. 100

[59] Bernhard, T., *The Lime Works*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 82

[60] *The Politics of Experience*, p, 49

[61] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 34

[62] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 50

promote the illusion of choice although the underlying format of their programmes is the same. On the other, everyone Joanna encounters seems attuned to existences ostensibly diverse but conceptually indistinguishable, and which seem to conspire to nip in the bud her urge to reject the false choices she seems expected to make, like the selection of a hoop through which to jump.

The source of her anguish is the tension between her sense of resignation and her incapacity to fully resign herself, so that, while unable to reconcile these irreconcilable states, she is equally unable to renounce them. Her awareness of her paralysis is revealed by her 'sudden need for a window to open on to some other way of life.' She feels

> a sudden pang of thirst; for the world that had been built up round her to fall away [...]; for the future to be unformed and unexpected [...]; for something to break the spell of [...] the world that was oppressing her - the life that had caught her in its net.[63]

Although her consciousness of this conceptual net produces the urge to disentangle herself, her failure to identify the collusion woven into its structure means that her attempts at escape merely propel her from one net to another, consolidating her predicament.

For Joanna, as for Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, the fixation on eluding modes of constraint embodied by the family produces a situation where the internalized family perpetually reasserts itself. However, this phenomenon is compounded by Laing's conjecture that constraining contexts exist independently of the individual experiencing them.

> The apparent irrationality of the individual finds its rationality in the original family context. But the family as a whole appears irrational. However we may expect that the irrationality of the family will find *its* rationality when placed in *its* context. And so on... presumably through

---

[63] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 39

> meta-meta-meta-contexts, until one arrives at the context of all social contexts [...]. This seems irrational enough, but may find its rationality in a further meta-context of which we have only vague intimations.[64]

In *Fowler's Snare*, even Dike's eventual death fails to break the deadlock of Joanna's parents' marriage.

> A piece of machinery was set into motion, more like the vibrating of a refrigerator than the explosion of a gun. But it was machinery all the same. It had the regularity of machinery. She invaded [...]; he invaded [...]. Regularly and with precision [...]. Every day she carefully unpicked the castle he was trying to build [...]; and every day he nibbled at the little pile of food she was carefully treasuring up for herself. They ate each other methodically and yet it seemed that neither would finally succeed in destroying the other. They needed each other too much. So they contented each other with [...] pinning each other like butterflies in a collection.[65]

This description defines their marriage as a microcosmic version of the social, where the collusive nature of micropolitical power has transformed premodern "explosions" of force into the mechanistic manœuvres by means of which a normalized equilibrium is maintained. In Foucault's words, 'the "dynamics" of continuous evolutions tend to replace the "dynastics" of solemn events.'[66] Joanna's interlude with Bric, embraced to cement her escape from David, mirrors embryonically the collusive deadlock of her parents' marriage.

> "Why do you keep eating me?" she flared, trembling with anger.
> " [...] Me eating *you*? I've just about destroyed myself trying [...] to make you react [...]. No wonder men hate women so often [...]. I have put every atom of energy into making you respond [...]. You make me feel as though the sharks have been at me, and yet you say that *I* have been eating *you*."
> [...] Joanna laughed suddenly at the irony of it. For that was how she had always thought of her mother's stiff unforgivingness, and her father's moth-eaten ego.[67]

---

[64] Laing, R. D., "The Study of Family and Social Contexts in Relation to the Origin of Schizophrenia," quoted in Kirsner, D., *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre and R. D. Laing* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976), p. 120

[65] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 42

[66] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 161

[67] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 150-1

Howarth-Williams defines the function of collusion as 'the mutual confirmation' of each player's 'phantasy position.' [68] Dike and Dora consolidate their battle by the denial that a battle is underway. Their collusive dynamic inferentially reveals the nature of the social in its generality, where the normalizing drive promotes a superficial stability, underpinned by the interplay of power and resistance. Not only does Joanna mistrust the veneer that Dike and Dora present to the world, the disparity between façade and reality seems replicated everywhere she turns. 'It seemed that all close relationships were a slow process of killing and eating.'[69] As Cooper argues, and as Josephine discovered in *The Ha-Ha*, 'the internal family [...] is externally reflected in all our relationships.'[70] This is the context in which Joanna's desire for a haven untainted by the family dynamic is doomed to be thwarted. Her internalization renders all such havens illusory.

As Doctorow observes, with reference to Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 'the antiques shop and the pied-à-terre are an artful construction of the Thought Police.'[71] Furthermore, as Foucault demonstrates, since current manifestations of the function of the Thought Police exist primarily in internalized form, they are impossible to elude in the absence of an interstitial perspective. Like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, Joanna's only hope is to transform her attitude from the preoccupation with spatial escape to an emphasis on a conceptual change of heart. This urge, however, is held in perpetual abeyance by her internalization of the normalizing drive. Joanna's tragedy is her focus on external change at the expense of interstitial transformation. Since it is only from within that changes can be wrought, her ongoing search for liberation is suffused with

---

[68] Howarth-Williams, p. 20
[69] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 175
[70] *The Death of the Family*, p. 109
[71] *Poets and Presidents*, p. 54

bitter irony. Her internalization of consensus expectations is so ingrained that, in the absence of anyone to articulate the implied command to jump through the hoops, she feels at a loss. 'Joanna made one or two jumps from the deep end [...], and then wondered what else one was supposed to do at a swimming pool.'[72]

[72] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 62

Joanna And Bric: Consolidation Of The Snare (The Futility Of Resistance That Fails To Engage At The Level Of Form)

Joanna's initial assumption that exchanging the stranglehold of life with David for an interlude with Bric will break the deadlock is gradually displaced by the uncanny recognition that an old snare has been replaced by a new. Just as David's sense of conviction implicitly invalidated her inarticulate longing for something different, she experiences Bric's professed lack of conviction, not only an affectation but a conviction in itself, as equally oppressive and constraining. When, in a reverie, she tells him, "'We shall find the Hesperides. We shall come upon the wonder,' Bric pulled a face. 'Well, first I'll fill our glasses.'"[73] His affectation of cynicism is as deadening as David's phoney idealism, rendering these seemingly polarized postures conceptually indistinguishable. However, Joanna's romantic optimism is equally misplaced, for her conception of "the wonder" casts it as something external, to be passively "come upon," rather than as something to be actively evolved through a revolution of perspective.

Sedgwick argues that since cynics are those without hope, and therefore no capacity to express demands for the future, for practical purposes they are 'the most adamant of conservatives.'[74] This is an apt description of Bric, but the insidiousness of his brand of conservatism means that initially Joanna is deceived. Although she is appalled by the overtness of David's conservatism, which manifests itself as a thraldom to habit, it is this very quality that enables her to conceptualize resistance. Bric, on the other hand, ostensibly represents the subversion of convention although,

---

[73] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 71

[74] Sedgwick, P., *Psychopolitics* (London: Pluto, 1982), p. 42

as becomes clear, his unconventionality is conventional in itself, particularly as it hardly seems authentic.

When the anticipation of release from David's world begins to falter, Bric's cynicism seems to permeate the scene. As he fumbles with his keys and she tries in vain 'to recapture the moment, the enchantment, the sense of immanence and immediacy' that she had felt before, 'a shoal of blankness and lost emotion washes over her.'[75] When he invites her back to his room 'the question was a momentous one; the moment was stamped on her mind,'[76] but her expectations are so immense that her impending disillusionment seems preordained. Predictably, his fumblings are identical to David's. 'She no longer felt joy; she no longer even felt uninhibited, but prim and detached as she watched his hands like spiders brushing over her [...]. All the time she was desperately wanting to cry out that this was a mistake.'[77] Dawson implies that the source of the deadlock is the tension between the professed desire for involvement and the concomitant resistance to involvement. Unlike Josephine's in *The Ha-Ha*, however, Joanna's disengagement is self-imposed.

> She wanted to run away, but the only thing to do was to try and act as though she were familiar with this procedure. Bric [...] stood there for a moment in the darkness, an enormous humped shadow that spread out towards her like a bat enfolding her as he moved over the room [...]. She lay stiff and still. She held her breath; she counted one, two, three, four, ten until the pain should be over. It was all taking too long. She thought she would be torn apart and destroyed, while Bric worked and struggled over her, as though she were a recalcitrant piece of machinery.[78]

The counting, which reformulates her silent recitation of French verbs with David, represents her resistance to participating in the shared charade. This resistance manifests itself in her desire to obliterate the implied habitual with the consciously

---

[75] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 74
[76] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 73
[77] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 75

and overtly habitualized. The irony is that her aloofness, her self-conscious sense of "primness," is the very thing from which, it seems, she most desires to hold herself aloof.

This sense of "splitting," where she observes herself as if from afar in a cerebralization of instinct, is defined by Laing in mechanistic terms. He argues that even when someone develops sufficient insight to see that such a process is underway, it tends to be experienced as 'an impersonal process' which cannot be controlled or stopped.

> There is thus some phenomenological validity in referring to such "defences" by the term "mechanism." [...] They have this mechanical quality, because the person as he experiences himself is dissociated from them [...]. They seem to be processes which he undergoes [...]. These defence mechanisms are actions taken by the person on his experience. On top of this he has dissociated himself from his own action.[79]

The fact that Joanna retreats into the same defence mechanisms with Bric as she did with David dramatizes the tightening of the snare. Ironically, her obsession with "finding an answer" is precisely what constitutes the problem. Her formulation of the question fails to engage with her tendency to distance herself from experience and thus block the potential for interstitial transcendence. This is the context in which Laing contends that the function of the therapist should ideally mirror that of the Zen master, 'to point out that suffering is not due to not getting "the answer," but is the very state of desire that assumes the existence of that kind of answer, and the frustration of never getting it.'[80]

The hopelessness of Joanna's search is encapsulated in her exchange with Bric in the aftermath of their carnal interlude:

---

[78] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 75-6
[79] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 30
[80] *Self and Others*, pp. 123-4

"Why did you come?" [...]
"I wanted something."
"Oh I see [...]. You wanted something but you didn't find it."
"No," she cried bitterly. "It's just the same."[81]

Although when she recalls his question, "'Can't you accept that life is its own aim and end? Why do you want anything else?"'[82] she sees that theoretically she is in agreement ("'Bric was right; there was nothing but life"'[83]), the stumbling block is the conversion of theory into practice. Her revelation needs to be released from its cerebral vacuum and assimilated so that it infuses and informs her experience.

Such fleeting insights compound her predicament as they reveal to her the possible which seems to be out of reach. Ironically, it seems to be the insight into the insight that holds it captive at the level of an insight. Although on occasion her mind momentarily springs back into place 'like a hollybush' and she is 'readmitted into life,'[84] the aftermath of these flashes of reintegration is despair, formulated in the thought, 'But it was not to be so.'[85] This sense of deflation seems inextricable from the fleeting elation because a trick of the mind makes hope suggest its opposite, so that despair is established as the truth.

When Bric defines life as its own reward, she agrees too late and immediately doubts herself as if her agreement, and its deferral, render the thought implicitly implausible. Since she allows him to do the defining for her and is so accustomed to defeat, or self-defeat, her consent seems to negate the definition. However, on another occasion, she muses that 'someone - was it Mendelsohn - who had been asked the meaning of one of his works had simply played it again. That was what it was

---

[81] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 78
[82] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 99
[83] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 119
[84] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 109
[85] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 110

about.'[86] This realization, which signified Josephine's breakthrough in *The Ha-Ha*, also informs Dawson's fiction of the '70s where music symbolizes the potential for transcendence within the interstitial, without which no structure could exist. However, what draws Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* to Mendelsohn's approach to music, from which can be inferred an attitude to life, she fails to apply to her own experience of existence.

Since her function in David's life is simply to focus his self-confirmation while Bric tries to annex her simply for the purpose of helping him escape from himself, in each case she feels equally estranged for in neither case is her own experience considered. There seem to be 'miles of distance stretching between her legs and head' as she surveys Bric 'staring through her, unrecognising, as though his eye had not seen her. He seemed to be looking into a different world - like a bird trapped and staring at the way out without seeing it.'[87] This image not only represents a projection of her own experience, it also offers an insight into Bric's motivations, as is revealed when he whines to her, '"Can't you see - I wanted to be a poet [...]. I am always confronted with my emptiness." [...] There hung between them that unreality that Joanna did not know how to handle or escape from.'[88] What she fails to grasp is that the unreality is not attributable solely to Bric but is rather a synergy of their unrealistic expectations.

Bric is merely another hoop, conceptually indistinguishable from the hoop represented by David. Therefore, although she goes through the motions of jumping, her inbuilt resistance and her neglect of the interstitial mean that she lands in the same place from which she left the ground.

---

[86] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 72-3
[87] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 135-6

> She saw that she had escaped from David into a world, into a game, that was narrower and more oppressive still; indeed, she had not escaped at all. For her escape to be complete she would have to return to the childhood world [...], the world of innocence, a bright, dazzling world, but one in which nothing could ever happen.[89]

Although she thinks in terms of escape, the fact that she is really referring to evasion is revealed in her nostalgia for a time when life appeared to be static and when there were no decisions to be made. This vision mirrors Josephine's sense of enchantment in the hospital room in *The Ha-Ha* but, unlike Josephine, Joanna fails to recognize that the feeling of being mesmerized implies a loss of will. Hesse discusses this phenomenon of paralysing nostalgia in terms of the post-lapsarian

> decay and slow collapse of childhood when we are abandoned by everything we love, and suddenly feel the loneliness and deathly cold of the world around us. And a great many people stay forever hanging on to this cliff and cling desperately their whole life through to the irrevocable past, the dream of the lost paradise which is the worst and most ruthless of all dreams.[90]

Adorno and Horkheimer likewise contend that Novalis' description of philosophy as homesickness 'holds true only if this longing is not dissolved into the phantasm of a lost remote antiquity, but represents the homeland, nature itself, as wrested from myth.'[91] However, in *Fowler's Snare*, Joanna's potential for breakthrough is blocked by her inability to conceptualize a self with the capacity for breakthrough existing outside the myth of the past. When it dawns on her that her exchange of David for Bric has been an exchange in name alone, instead of analysing her feelings of suffocation and her connivance in the formation of these sensations, her next proposed escape-route is the Church, whose appeal is its reflection of the childhood world which she sees as the archetypal symbol of escape. For here the aura of the

---

[88] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 139
[89] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 82
[90] Hesse, H., *Demian* (London: Panther Books Ltd., 1971), p. 47

preordained is so abstract and impersonal that initially she ceases to feel oppressed. Yet once again her insight forethwarts her. Her first impression, of 'rows of people waiting; rows of arms, suppliant rows of arms with coins grasped,'[92] suggests that just as she knew beforehand that accompanying Bric to his room would break the spell, and yet went through with it anyway as if to prove her point, she suspects in advance that the Church can offer her no salvation yet seeks to immerse herself nonetheless. Inevitably, a self-fulfilling prophecy is generated by this sense of predestination, which reduces experience to an illustration of the thought. Laing surmised that 'the greatest solace in religion is the sense that one lives in the presence of an Other,'[93] but this is precisely why Joanna withdraws from it.

Unlike Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, she fails to consider that the sense of release can only be born of a synergy of the individual seeking release and an intersection of her circumstances, the way in which she chooses to perceive them and the understanding that, to a degree, these circumstances are constituted by expectations concerning them. Although her reluctance to surrender to events is the source of her desire to escape, it is this reluctance, not her circumstances, that constitutes the nature of the snare. Whereas Josephine at the end of *The Ha-Ha* inwardly echoes the protagonist of *The Snake Pit*, 'If this be shelter, give me storm away from the hills,'[94] Joanna persists in her conviction, as inferred from her response to her encounters, that redemption can be activated only by withdrawal. She and Bric formulate their thoughts in different terms and therefore always disagree.

"Ennui," Bric murmured.

---

[91] Adorno, T. & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London & New York: Verso, 1992), p. 78

[92] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 84

[93] *Self and Others*, p. 136

[94] *The Snake Pit*, p. 264

> "Nostalgia," said Joanna.
> "Ennui," Bric repeated, "But in the boredom of satiety the imagination can get to work [...]. If you were faced with the termination of your life, you wouldn't have time for this nostalgia. Why don't you try to reinterpret the signs?"[95]

Interestingly, this prefigures, albeit in the realm of theory, the experience of the protagonist of Dawson's next novel, *The Cold Country.* Yet Joanna fails even to *interpret* the signs, let alone reinterpret them. She ensnares herself in the Church because she sees it as a replica of the dazzling world of childhood, from which she feels exiled into an adult world of hoops. When she follows the Mother Superior, she imagines herself to be swimming in water 'that is deep and cold and shadowed,'[96] an image reminiscent of the metaphorically subaquatic world of childhood, remote from the cross-currents of power and resistance. Whether her childhood truly resembled her recollections seems doubtful, not only because presumably her mother would have featured in it but also because the past recalled invariably seems steeped in a substance extraneous to its experience at the time. As Freud put it, 'it is not that the present reinterprets the past, but that there is a retardation of meaning [...]. The past means nothing until it comes into being in the present.'[97] This is a theme explored in greater depth in Dawson's fiction of the 1970s.

---

[95] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 156-7
[96] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 105
[97] Freud, S., "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," quoted in Mitchell, J., *Mad Men and Medusas. Reclaiming hysteria and the effects of sibling relations on the human condition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 283

The Triumph Of The Normalizing Drive

In *Fowler's Snare*, the inner impediment blocking Joanna's potential to find a reprieve from the hoops is conveyed by her realization that she cannot trespass 'beyond a frontier that she had lain down for herself in a set of rules.'[98] Dawson's later fiction engages more fully with the theme of nostalgia's innate conservatism. For nostalgia rejects the transformation of perceptions of the present and instead harks back to a time whose perceived enchantment stems from the very the need for them to be transformed. This is the context in which Hermann Broch refers to our feelings, or rather our 'conventions of feeling,' as 'an indestructible fund of conservatism' and hence as 'atavisms.' [99] Freud likewise argued that the instincts themselves are 'of a conservative nature; the state, whatever it may be, which an organism has reached, gives rise to a tendency to re-establish that state as soon as it has been abandoned.'[100]

Joanna passively waits for an answer to proceed from an unspecified external source, whether sweeping over the rooftops and past the T.V. aerials or lurking in the ritual of the Mass. Musing upon the existence or otherwise of God, she surmises that it seems 'to add up to the same thing either way,'[101] a conjecture that appears to disappoint her. Despite the fact that their conclusions are identical, her response dissociates her from the existentialist standpoint whose emphasis on the potential agency of the subject makes it more hopeful in its implications. Sartre argues that his understanding of existentialism 'is not atheist in the sense that it would exhaust itself in demonstrations of the non-existence of God. It declares, rather, that even if God existed, that would make no difference' for 'what man needs is to find himself again

---

[98] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 106

[99] Broch, H., *The Sleepwalkers*, trans. by Willa & Edwin Muir (London: Quartet Ltd., 1986), p. 52

[100] Quoted in Fromm, E., *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 603

and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God.' Existentialism, as he conceives it, is 'a doctrine of action,'[102] which is precisely why Joanna is resistant to its tenets.

The futility of her search is guaranteed not only by her withdrawal at the critical moment from potentially liberating interstitial encounters but also by the self-mystification which obscures her motives. Whenever she seems on the verge of a breakthrough, the fact that her patterns of thought are already inscribed with future constraint converts the potential transformation into a conceptual replication of the deadlock. The structure of the mechanics of these manœuvres relies on them being obscured from her conscious mind. Wittgenstein proposed that for a line to be drawn, even in thought, we have to be able to think on either side of it. Therefore, since identity is defined by its limits, to understand our own nature we should have to be able to think on both sides of these limits, an endeavour beyond the wherewithal of any finite creature.[103] Schopenhauer made a similar point in his implied analogy between actual and metaphorical vision. 'Just as on the retina the precise point of entry of the optic nerve is blind ... , the eye sees everything except itself.'[104]

Adam Phillips contends that 'how we escape from our lives is our life'[105] but, since in *Fowler's Snare* Joanna's life is in itself an escape, her attempts to escape it represent the desire to escape from an escape, to surmount her sense of dissociation. Her resistance to participation prevents her from conceptualizing calling God into being through her prayers; instead she waits passively for Him to miraculously make

---

[101] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 47

[102] *Existentialism and Humanism*, p. 56

[103] in Magee, B. & M Milligan, *On Blindness* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 20

[104] Schopenhauer, A., *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966), p. 332 (vol. 1)

[105] Phillips, A. *Darwin's Worms* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1999), p. 83

His presence known (as she conceived of "the wonder" as something to be passively "come upon"). However, this hope resists fulfilment as the atmosphere of the convent appeals to her precisely because it recalls the solipsism of childhood.

The conviction of Alison, Joanna's friend who is now a novice, reveals to her by contrast her own inability or reluctance to affiliate herself, a resistance primarily attributable to the fact that she seems to doubt the existence of a self which could engage in a symbiotic or synergistic exchange. 'Alison Short would have put on a bold, undaunted smile as she launched into her evening devotions, that made her proof against the fact of things themselves, as Joanna herself was not.'[106] She is held perpetually on the brink by a fear of herself which masquerades as bewilderment in the face of other people's perceived lack of doubt.

Yet Eco presents in a different light the antithesis of God to the world of "things" which Joanna construes as negating His existence.

> This God who is not passes through the very history of Christianity. He hides himself, is ineffable, can be drawn upon only through negative theology, is the sum of what cannot be said about him; in speaking of him we celebrate our ignorance and he is named at most as vortex, abyss, desert, solitude, silence, absence. This is the God that the sense of the sacred feeds upon, ignoring the institutionalized churches.[107]

Unlike De Quincey, who feels oppressed and burdened by "the incommunicable," Eco cites this incommunicability as the essence of "the wonder" that Joanna longs in vain to "come upon." However, since she lacks and revolts against a sense of "self," in her perception the inconceivability of the archetypal "other" negates rather than activates "the sacred."

---

106 *Fowler's Snare*, p. 121

107 Eco, U., *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1986), p. 93

Although she resents the fact that other people seem to conspire and 'tacitly agree to leave the real things unsaid,'[108] she falls into the same trap herself.

> I want my life to fluff out. I am in the fowler's snare [...]. One's doppelgänger can describe the fowler's snare; one's doppelgänger can cry out in protest and revolt against oppression; can voice its need for some new and wider existence; for a new land; but not one's self.[109]

This sense of estrangement is informed by Laing's theory of the divided self, blighted by the introjection of collectively reifed projections which impose an oppressive social reality divorced from individual intentionality. However, since only Joanna, the individual in question, can access her intentions or any other aspect of her own inner life, she is naïve to forget that other people's hidden lives are as inaccessible to her as hers is to them. Although she wonders 'how it could be that the way one appeared to other people corresponded so little to what one really was, and was feeling,'[110] it seems not to occur to her that her perceptions of other people might equally fail to correspond to how they perceive themselves.

She falls into this trap with Bric, as she does with David, and thus colludes in the way that these relationships come to resemble that of her parents which she sees as depressingly archetypal and archetypally depressing. Its orbit, which symbolically she never really left, reclaims her explicitly with the slow process of her father's death. 'They were looking towards Joanna, appealing to her to throw out something like a raft they could cling to in the conversational deadlock.'[111] 'She could not bear to watch the battle between husband and wife, or rather, the termination of it. It seemed

---

[108] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 58
[109] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 59-60
[110] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 60-1
[111] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 168

to be a kind of treachery to her father, whom she loved, to see him sitting there so mauled.'[112]

The presence of death fleetingly displaces her paralysis, as Bric predicted it would. 'There was only one world, and she would not try to preserve herself from its impact.'[113] As with Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, the shock of events transfigures and exfoliates her habitualized perceptions, so that she apprehends things with a defamiliarized intensity:

> The birds screeching; the soft birds oozing down the walls [...]. For a moment there was an obscene orchestra [...], throats swallowing, the birds running up and down the walls on strings, and Dike lying there, part of this machinery, this world of things happening with little spurts of life, then death [...]. She walked along the highway, and the advertisements for soft-drinks and margarine mocked her as they mocked Dike who was dying.[114]

Yet, unlike Josephine, her courage fails and her reactions ultimately mirror those of her mother whose initial cry, '"I have killed him,"' is instantly eclipsed when she 'pulled herself together, like a puppet with its arms and joints set, and murmured, "We could not have wanted him to live."'[115] Despite Joanna's awareness that the first expression was the more exact and that had Dike not been killed by Dora she would have been killed by him, the fact of death extinguishes her will to elude the archetype represented by her parents' marriage.

The momentum established by her series of futile attempts at escape propels her back to the fold of the collusive paradigm.

> It was only by keeping up this game with David, this pattern of little things, that she could keep the thought of Dike and death from trickling in at the back of her mind. Bric represented exploration, but she only wanted a smooth wall of assurance [...]. David represented her family; he represented her father [...].

---

[112] *Fowler's Snare*, pp. 167-8
[113] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 171
[114] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 174
[115] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 175

> She was trying to shore up a way of life that was collapsing; she was trying to prevent Dike from dissolving completely in her mind.[116]

McNay emphasizes how Foucault's ethics of the self is based not 'upon adherence to externally imposed moral obligations, but rather upon an ethic of who we are said to be, and what, therefore, it is possible for us to become.'[117] The constraints in *Fowler's Snare* conceptually reformulate those that Josephine experiences in *The Ha-Ha*. Yet, whereas Josephine, who identifies herself with a future, however hypothetical, ultimately seizes autonomy as its own reward and as a potential agent of engagement, Joanna identifies herself with the past which according to her purposes she either perceives as unsatifactory or construes as myth. She concludes that 'to exercise choice seemed to be the only way, in this world that had complete death at the end, of remaining aloof.'[118] Her own terms confound her and she allows what she is said to be to stifle what it might have been possible for her to become. The mechanical staccato of her final inner commentary structurally replicates the leaps of the circus dogs, revealing her surrender to the pressure of the consensus expectations metaphorically represented by the hoops.

> One, two; the clock ticked. The birds went up and down on the roof. One, two. Up, down. Dora came up [...]. They all smiled. Life began again. David was right after all. One adapts or one dies. One dies in any case, so let's not make too many difficulties.[119]

Dawson thus implies not only that the conclusion matters less than the process by which it is reached and the spirit in which it is embraced, but also that its nature derives from what motivates the asking of the question. Joanna, like Josephine, concludes that "the posture's absurd" but, whereas for Josephine this constitutes a

---

[116] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 177
[117] McNay, L., *Foucault and Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 90
[118] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 180
[119] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 182

springboard for further questions about how to try to live, for Joanna it represents a ruse to justify the avoidance of further thought. Dawson's first two novels thus explore the continuum of resisting and succumbing to the pressures of the myriad applications of the normalizing drive. *The Cold Country*, her next work of fiction, examines the dilemma of how to forge a life that *enacts* resistance, rather than merely conceptualizing it.

The Cold Country

Internalization Of The *Status Quo*

Unlike that in *The Ha-Ha* and *Fowler's Snare*, in *The Cold Country* the dynamic between the characters and the structures they represent is politically contextualized by the novel's social background. The interplay between microcosm and macrocosm is dramatized by a range of manifestations of ontologically destructive collusion with the strategies of normalizing power. Zay internalizes and perpetuates the myth of consent established by childhood assault, Miss Dicks complies avidly with her social and psychiatric marginalization and Dickie, her son, in an attempt to preserve his perspective, misconstrues and desecrates the concept of "survival." His father, Sir Thomas, who personifies the power of "social class," functions as a link between the microcosm and the macrocosm. An embodiment of the self-deification of power, he seeks to order and delineate the social, on one level by marginalizing Dickie's mother, Zay and Dickie himself (his wealth and confidence normalizing the prospect of their "unborn children" being aborted), and on another by lobbying for "urban renewal." He also represents "nuclear deterrence," for which the populace clamours to cement and demonstrate their membership of the group. The *status quo* is thus consolidated by the liquidation of the potential for dissent. Dickie's mother's "grey matter," Dickie's eccentricity, Zay's "unborn child," an evolving community and nuclear protesters are portrayed as a threat against which consensus opinion is generated, mobilized and perpetually reinforced. Sir Thomas thus illustrates the incitement to collusion implicit in the normalizing drive, whose internalization reveals the continuum of the mutually consolidating dialects of power.

Dickie: The Tensions Between Invalidation And The Collusive Identification With Power

The Cold Country, Dawson's third work of fiction, published in 1965, presents a network of resonances extending the themes explored in her previous novels. Again the individual is presented as subject to the overlapping dialects of the normalizing drive through which power micropolitically articulates itself. However, the vertiginous interplay of reflections and refractions between the social background and the lives of individuals is less oblique here than in Dawson's earlier works. The evolution of her fiction can be seen as a gradual opening of the eyes of her protagonists to the ever-widening social world that seeks to constrain their consciousness. "Inner" struggles begin to be complemented by "actual" ones, and different perspectives begin to be dramatized by an expanding cast of characters rather than deriving solely from their internalization as tensions in an individual mind. Autobiographical interiority is displaced as the spotlight fractures to illuminate a spectrum of distinct and disparate characters, the structures they represent and the ontological wars of attrition in which they are perpetually engaged.

The authorial lens draws back to reveal the social space where, as Deleuze puts it, 'centres of power and disciplinary techniques form multiple segments, linked to one another, which the individuals of a mass traverse or inhabit.' The elusive entity of power is therefore characterized by 'immanence of field without transcendent unification, continuity of line without global centralization, and contiguity of parts without distinct totalization.'[1] The interlocking strands of normalizing power which

---

[1] Deleuze, G., *Foucault*, trans. by S. Hand (London: The Athlome Press, 1988), p. 27

constitute the world of *The Cold Country* are contextualized by Foucault's contention that such a system, although physically dispersed, 'covers the entirety of a society.'[2]

In the novel, The Civil Defence League, whose purpose it is to "protect" the populace, regardless of whether or not they desire such protection, is reflected microcosmically in the psychic violence unleashed on individuals who are allegedly being controlled "for their own good." Similarly, the insidious march of demolition, paving the way for less unsightly edifices, is mirrored metaphorically by the attempted reconstruction of individuals as homogenous and normalized social subjects. All these mutually reinforcing phenomena illustrate the processes of invasion, destruction and "reconstruction" by which the social is defined. The world of the novel can thus be contextualized with reference to a Foucauldian analysis of power relations, described by Deleuze as 'simultaneously local, unstable and diffuse,' not emanating from 'a central point or unique locus of sovereignty' but moving from one point to another 'in a field of forces, marking inflections, resistances, twists and turns.'[3]

The Cold Country is a hall of mirrors, where sites of proposed control and normalization overlap, with power functioning as 'a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally.' The network binds 'the whole together,' traversing it 'in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another.'[4] The gatherings at Duffyn Hall, the so-called debates about nuclear deterrence, "Urban Planning," the execution of leucotomy, the act of rape and other forms of bodily invasion, are all variations on a theme. The purpose of each assault is to invalidate the recipient to the point at which all semblance of autonomy is lost. The individual, having been induced to doubt his own response, thus turns

---

[2] *Power/Knowledge*, p. 68
[3] *Foucault*, p. 73

instead to a "higher authority" to define the situation and tell him what to think. The intersection of consciousness and experience is the site of the enactment of these assaults. Yet in interstitial flashes the individual is glimpsed, closely guarding the flame of himself and against the odds continuing to value his existence. The sword of Damocles hanging over the fate of the "unborn child" in the novel is a metaphor for the precariousness of survival. This is the novel's focus, touched upon implicitly by all its other strands.

The Cold Country initially revolves around a male protagonist, Dicks, who is ceaselessly buffeted from pillar to post and to whose experience of the world the novel's title refers. When he meets Zay, who becomes the reluctant incubator of his "unborn child," he is partially eclipsed as a character and splits to become the chronicler of a range of experiences, none of them conceptually dissimilar from his own. Although his struggles in many ways mirror those of his fictional predecessors, Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* and Joanna in *Fowler's Snare*, his circumstances are such that he lacks the leisure (a luxury with an inbuilt sting in its tail) to think himself onto the borders of psychic paralysis or "breakdown." However, although the writer Mandelstam argues that 'our mysterious awe in the face of existence itself is always overridden by the more primitive fear of violence and destruction,'[5] Dawson's protagonists never fully lose this "mysterious awe." Conversely, violence and destruction paradoxically intensify it by functioning as its context and illuminating by contrast the miraculous nature of its survival.

Without a hospital, university or family to constrain him, Dickie lacks a framework, and worries about the rent. Held back from the brink of himself by

---

[4] *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 176-7

[5] Mandelstam, N., *Hope Against Hope*, trans. by M. Hayward (London: Collins Harvill, 1989), p. 85

practical concerns, he instinctively tries to immerse himself in someone else's life. The self-conscious anguish that a different kind of upbringing might have activated is sublimated into the poetry he writes, a pursuit viewed by others as a ludicrous affectation but at which, symbolically, he doggedly persists.

His poetry, about loneliness and the inexplicable sense of loss, reanimates his earlier incarnations in Dawson's fiction, implying the trajectory along which his life might have flowed had it not been always limited by the banks of external factors beyond his control. His poems reveal his otherwise unexpressed inner experience which for once need not be inferred from his response to events. Furthermore, his poetry fractures the authorial voice for, in Dawson's third novel, the unmediated fears of the protagonist are channelled and sublimated, rather than overflowing to fill the frame. Writing, for Dickie, represents the urge to unravel a living thread of thought from the cluttered coldness of the world. The poems, outnumbered by rejection slips, like their author nonetheless prevail, testifying to a resolute self-assertion in the face of a world that veers between indifference, hostility and contempt.

Side-stepping the usual device of harnessing a character as a mouthpiece, the narrative voice interjects that 'no-one is as poor as their well-wishers intend [...]. When someone thinks poorly of himself, it is easy to take up his self-valuation. Catch him, however, attaching warm feelings to the thought of his existence, and it is hard not to grow teeth.'[6] Dickie's father and his sycophants 'could not forgive him for prizing his life, for being pleased, when they were sorry for him.'[7] In full flow, he offends their sensibilities even more than when he stumbles. 'The days of his soft

---

[6] Dawson, J., *The Cold Country* (London: Anthony Blond Ltd., 1965), p. 6
[7] *The Cold Country*, p. 9

underbelly were tiresome enough. But Dickie *triumphans* they could not tolerate.'[8] His attitude, however, is unencumbered by smugness, for his moments of happiness are private and at nobody's expense. Dickie, Sir Thomas's illegitimate son, causes consternation among the Duffyn Hall entourage because he confounds their expectations, not only by appearing impervious to their pity but by failing to conform to the rôle laid down for him as hapless beneficiary of their bounty. The delight in being alive that sporadically overwhelms him is reflected in the poetry he writes - clumsy, sincere and undeterred by the publishers' rejections.

When his father, whose approval he has sought in vain throughout his life, discloses how this son of his, this embarrassing reminder of a distant misspent youth, came into being, Dickie's dignity and pleasure in being alive not only remain intact but are confirmed. Although he stares appalled 'as though it were his death-sentence'[9] as his father writes a cheque for Zay's abortion and time implodes, he weathers the attempted desecration.

> "Five hundred," his father beamed [...]. "My father was rolling, but he kept me so short that I know just how a penny feels. I tried everywhere to raise the money ..." he winked. "But in those days - you had to face - " He stopped. He had gone just too far.[10]

Without vengefulness, malice or hysteria, the accidental son displays himself calmly before his father.

> "I'm glad you didn't have the cash, incidentally." His voice was proud, "when you were my age [...]. I know that sometimes I give the wrong impression [...] but that's not the final version of the story, not by a long stretch of the imagination [...]. I'll never even get them published. But all the same, I've got my life [...]. Even if you'd *had* the cash when my mother was expecting. Even if you'd had it, something would have been lost." He searched. "Something

---

[8] *The Cold Country*, p. 79
[9] *The Cold Country*, p. 126
[10] *The Cold Country*, p. 126

> would have been lost." [...] He had spent his whole adult life trying to make him answer, and here it was, at last, a cheque for an abortion.[11]

Even as the ground is ripped from under his feet and the fantasy father who loves him is demythologized at last, an inbuilt resistance sustains him. Although his sense of isolation weighs him down - 'he could never go down the streets without a feeling of oppression, as though he were thirsty and they gave him parched rubber, slaked lime, ash, and hot copper oil'[12] - he tries to negotiate his life without compromising himself. Doubts assail him throughout the novel. 'Why did no one see him as he saw himself?'[13] 'Why had they not invited him to stay? Why didn't they realize what he was? He looked at the rejection slip. Why couldn't he make them answer?'[14] 'He tried hard, but silence [...] only leads back to itself.'[15] However, in his external life he never projects his frustrations onto others. Instead of railing against his oppressors, he channels his anger into the poems which purify the echoes in his head - '"If I can't make you answer, I'll make you cry!"'[16] '"If they won't answer me, I'll make them!"'[17]

Although with hindsight he realizes that it might have been better to scream, and that the line dividing dignity from denial and acquiescence can be blurred, he does at least side-step the full force of other people's pseudo-benevolent meddling in his life. Thus he eludes the fate of his "mad" mother who surrendered to a social definition of herself and was thus irretrievably lost. Referring hypothetically to the abortion money, he declares, '"I'll ask my father. He's *got* the money. But [...] I don't

---

11 *The Cold Country*, p. 127
12 *The Cold Country*, p. 15
13 *The Cold Country*, p. 46
14 *The Cold Country*, p. 50
15 *The Cold Country*, p. 65
16 *The Cold Country*, p. 51
17 *The Cold Country*, p. 69

think he'd give me five bob for a job like that. If he was that type I wouldn't be here [...]. But I'm here all right, aren't I? In spite of you all.'"[18] '"He'd give me money for my wedding, I know, but I doubt it for this kind of job."'[19] Although he is consciously deluding himself, the fact that he does indeed exist in spite of the lot of them remains.

Although in this sense the sacrifice of his mother was not in vain, Dickie, having survived (symbolically at the cost of her life), experiences the guilt associated with "survivor pathology." As the novel develops, his efforts to counteract this guilt by "doing the right thing" are gradually displaced as he realizes that "survival" is a more contentious term than he had initially assumed. However, his attitude to his poems is symbolic for, although they are unwanted, as he is himself, and although he never argues their objective worth, he values them in the same way that he values his own existence. Canetti argues that

> *everyone* is the midpoint of the world, absolutely everyone, and the world is precious only because it is full of such midpoints. That is the meaning of the word "human;" each person is a midpoint next to countless others, who are midpoints as much as he.[20]

Canetti cites Karl Kraus's observation that 'the census has revealed that Vienna has 2,030,834 inhabitants. Namely, 2,030, 833 souls and me'[21] and in a similar vein Hesse contends that 'the works of Goethe are not Goethe, and the volumes of Dostoevsky are not Dostoevsky, they are only an attempt, a dubious and never successful attempt to conjure up the many-voiced multitudinous world of which he was the central point.'[22] Judging by the poetic extracts that Dickie in *The Cold Country* reads to the tittering and unmoved women he half-heartedly lures to his room, he is equally far

---

18 *The Cold Country*, p. 117
19 *The Cold Country*, p. 118
20 Canetti, E., "Dialogue with the Cruel Partner," in *The Conscience of Words and Earwitness*, trans. by J. Neugroschel (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1987), p. 43
21 "The New Karl Kraus," in *The Conscience of Words and Earwitness*, p. 135

from being a Goethe as from a Dostoevsky. However, one suspects that his motives for writing are perhaps not dissimilar from those attributed by Hesse to these two men. Unlike the protagonists of Dawson's first two novels, he encounters his fellow components of the social as midpoints unto themselves. Since any latent solipsistic tendencies are sublimated into the poetry he writes, the rest of his life is preserved from their invasions. Dickie seems to write in order to keep his outer life from being tainted by his hidden misery.

Dawson surmises in the afterword to the 1985 edition of *The Ha-Ha* that Josephine's "hysterical outbursts" might have been less frequent 'if her mother had been Black or worked in a hen-debeaking factory.'[23] Since Dickie's circumstances in *The Cold Country* are less removed from those that Dawson here proposes, "madness," in Josephine's sense, is never considered an option. The expression of his sense of estrangement is confined to the realm of his poems, where he can be a midpoint without causing offence. Although ostensibly meant for the consumption of the public, they are composed in solitude, away from the "looks" that seek to obliterate his tenuous perception of himself. Paradoxically, although they are written on the periphery of his life, his "real life" taking shape as he grows to love Zay (or what she comes to represent for him), they also function as a means of forging an interstitial space of freedom. For here he is free to be himself as he sees himself, rather than being constrained by the ways in which he is seen. This is one of writing's functions, but in the novel it also serves as a metaphor for Dickie's refusal to follow his mother's example and passively succumb to shameful silence. Just as the "unborn

---

[22] Hesse, H., "On Reading Books," in *My Belief*, trans. by Denver Lindley (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1985), p. 105

[23] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 181

child," forever under threat, focuses his defiant delight in his physical existence, the poems are a symbol of his commitment to surviving psychically. Sartre contends that

> an object in a story does not derive its density of existence from the number and length of the descriptions devoted to it, but from the complexity of its connections with the different characters. The more often the characters handle it, take it up, and put it down, in short, go beyond it towards their own ends, the more real it will appear. Thus, of the world of the novel [...], we may say that in order for it to offer its maximum density the disclosure-creation by which the reader discovers it must also be an imaginary participation in the action [...]. Naming is already a modification of the object.[24]

Dickie's poems in *The Cold Country* not only symbolize his struggle to articulate and thereby seek to triumph over his anguish; the spectrum of responses they evoke in those around him also encapsulate people's attitudes to him. It seems he is begrudged this faltering assertion, and only Zay sees them for what they are (although the following exchange reveals the divergence in their outlooks). '"No one quite sees what I am,"' he explains. 'She was puzzled. "What does that matter?"'[25]

Laing contends that language itself can indicate why it cannot say what it cannot say

> by its interstices, by its emptiness and lapses, by the lattice-work of words, syntax, sound and meanings. The modulations of pitch and volume delineate the form precisely by not filling in the spaces between the lines. But it is a grave mistake to mistake the lines for the pattern, or the pattern for that which it is patterning.[26]

While Dickie's predecessors in Dawson's fiction seem blighted by the kernel of incipient futility at the heart of any endeavour, Dickie by dint of circumstance participates as well as being a critic. Although the content of his poetry is irrelevant, what it is "patterning" is his need to prove himself worthy of existence. Zay instinctively grasps that the poems primarily represent the desire to be understood,

---

24 *What is Literature?*, pp. 43-4
25 *The Cold Country*, p. 68
26 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 35

rather than the anticipation of being understood, a perception informed by Samuel Beckett's contention that 'it's the attitude that counts it's the intention.'[27]

Dickie's poems are a vehicle by means of which their author tries to understand himself and to counter the undermining effects of alien interpretations of who he is, or considers himself to be. His response to the presence of the "unborn child" is a conceptually-parallel projected manifestation of his prizing of his life in the face of more overt threats, both metaphorical and actual. This incipient existence represents the site where his own past, and its stranglehold on his present, clashes with Zay's, and her own past's stranglehold on hers. As what Sartre refers to as 'an object in the story,' it engenders a dense and tangled network of resonances and connections, through which each character's attitudes are obliquely and inferentially revealed.

In Sartre's *The Age of Reason* (1945), the prospect of abortion is never raised as a real concern, stunningly least of all by Marcelle herself, the site of its proposed enactment. Instead it functions as a launching pad for the tortuous metaphysical dilemmas of the men. This is a phenomenon contextualized by Canetti's contention that since philosophy has 'terminated its age of universality, the age of great compendiums,' it 'has had to remove its most urgent questions from its logical space or, as Wittgenstein says, expel them into mysticism. And this is the point at which the mission of literature begins.'[28] Although *The Age of Reason* is a philosophical novel, as a novel rather than a philosophical tract the synergy of its resonances should ideally cast light on the characters whose response to the dilemma in hand constitutes each individual refrain.

---

[27] Beckett, S., *How It Is*, trans. by the author (London: John Calder, 1996), p. 98
[28] *The Conscience of Words*, p. 6

Canetti cites the 'avoidance of the concrete'[29] as among the most sinister tendencies in intellectual history. *The Age of Reason* does not so much avoid the concrete as cursorily invoke it, only for it to be swept away by a tide of existential concerns, hanging unencumbered in the void. In *The Roads to Freedom*, for example, the abiding impression is that Matthieu's rejection of political passivity might have taken the same form had he been a German living in Nazi Germany. In other words, Sartre "avoids" examining "the concrete" implications of the act in favour of exploring the complex issue of "engagement."

Foucault observes that for Sartre, meaning 'never coincides with an event, and from this evolves a logic of signification, a grammar of the first person, and a metaphysics of consciousness.'[30] While this approach is plausible in terms of life as it is actually experienced, Dawson's technical orchestrations reveal how time can be shown and felt to implode. A common "meaning" evoked by a particular event or state (in *The Cold Country*, the presence of the "unborn child") resuscitates various past events retrospectively seen to have dramatized conceptually similar meanings. The spatial juxtaposition of these events creates by implication the impression of temporal simultaneity. In *The Cold Country*, experience, as the starting point, evokes a meaning whose impact derives from its application to other experiences.

Onto "the unborn child" Dickie projects his desire to preserve his own existence, a desire intensified by the revelation that this existence so narrowly escaped being nipped in the bud. 'He was here by money accident. Suddenly he felt weak, and

---

[29] *The Conscience of Words*, p. 14

[30] Bouchard, D. F. (ed.), *Language, counter-memory, practice. Selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault*, trans. by D. F. Bouchard & S. Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 175

wanted his child.'[31] Although, objectively, the existence or otherwise of just one "midpoint" among so many others is irrelevant, to the midpoint in question this can hardly be expected to be the case.

Through all Dawson's fiction, and manifested in various ways in each of her protagonists, runs an underlying astonishment that the world should be as it is. For Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, this sense of wonder is dramatized by the hallucinated prehistoric ungulates where now there are Oxford colleges and talk of income brackets. These visions symbolize the primacy of the arbitrary and reveal her awareness of the purposeless process that never had humanity in mind. Her paralysis is compounded by the 'hit-or-miss' of words [32] and by the fact that there are 'so many things in the world ... and it might so easily not have been at all.'[33] This sense of vertigo is the phenomenon defined by Broch as an awareness of the 'liberty allowing things to be otherwise.'[34] Josephine's hallucinations are novelistically reanimated when Dickie in *The Cold Country* tries to shatter Father Thigh's complacent belief in religious redemption. '"Have you ever thought that at one time, instead of hymns to the Virgin and confessions of sin, there were giant marsh snails with snouts, and maybe [...] the rustle of a few whelks."'[35] Similarly, Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* is stunned by the way that something like a storm can be intercepted by 'houses and television aerials.'[36]

Dicks in *The Cold Country* prizes his life so highly precisely because it so narrowly escaped being nipped in the bud. In the afterword to *The Ha-Ha*, Dawson

---

[31] *The Cold Country*, p. 128
[32] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 53
[33] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 39
[34] Broch, H., *The Sleepwalkers*, trans. by Willa & Edwin Muir (London: Quartet Ltd., 1986), p. 293
[35] *The Cold Country*, p. 112
[36] *Fowler's Snare*, p. 34

proposes that if you are 'concussed by the fact that human language and civilization is [...] a miracle freak,' you are likely to see life as 'something to be treasured more than the deliberate or intended gift' and to feel a 'heightened sense of human freedom.'[37] The fact that the very existence of consciousness is arbitrary she considers not a discouraging but an 'emancipating' thought as it offers the opportunity to make 'what you will out of a neutral.' This, as she discloses a quarter of a century after the publication of *The Ha-Ha*, was what she would have liked to have splashed across the page with 'the savage licence of a court jester.'[38]

When Dickie in *The Cold Country* lived with his aunt and his cousin Jean after his mother's surrender, any flash of autonomy was seen to be a threat.

> "He's going the same way as his mother, if you ask me."
> His aunt would look, and shake her head: "It's his system troubling him again."
> When they got home, she would get out her enema, and tighten her lips: "I'm not doing this to punish you [...]. We just want you to be healthy [...]."
> "It's for your own good," Jean would add, watching greedily.
> After that, whenever he was cold or homesick, or answered back, his aunt would purse her lips and look at him. "It's for your own good."
> And Jean would nod and agree, avidly, with half-closed eyes.[39]

This phenomenon is contextualized by the Laingian credo that the function of the family is to 'cut off transcendence [...]: to create, in short, one-dimensional man: to promote respect, conformity, obedience [...]: to promote a respect for "respectability."'[40] To this end, Dickie's aunt wields her enema to complement and reinforce her pacification strategy of insisting on the mindless chanting of hymns. Her behaviour exemplifies the misconception that morality consists solely of a perpetuation in others of one's own denied or unrealized frustration and thwartedness.

---

[37] Afterword to *The Ha-Ha* (1985), p. 184
[38] Afterword to *The Ha-Ha* (1985), p. 185
[39] *The Cold Country*, p. 14
[40] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 55

Her threats recall the threat of E.C.T. and lobotomy that hangs over the "patients" in the "hospital" in *The Ha-Ha*, where psychic obliteration explicitly lies in wait for anyone resistant to the usual techniques of social normalization. Just as Josephine witnesses the approach of the operatives with their 'black boxes and rubber gags,'[41] Dickie's aunt and cousin stand there, 'waiting to advance [...], smiling [...] as though there were an understanding.'[42] (This sense of connivance is intensified in Zay's case where she, too, "the victim," is drawn into the collusive dynamic in the wake of her uncle's assault.) These intimations of conspiracy, open to invalidation through being attributed to "paranoid delusions" (a pseudo-justification for the continuing assaults of normalization) are characteristic of psychic invasion, whether metaphorical or actual.

In the light of Goffman's contention that 'characteristically, the inmate is excluded from knowledge of the decisions [...] regarding his fate,'[43] Dickie's early life conceptually replicates Josephine's experience in the psychiatric hospital. In both cases, the mystifying mantra "it's for your own good" that accompanies the assaults of their captors is designed to compound the existing sense of self-doubt. By means of conceptual and semantic distortion, any attempt at revolt is seen to confirm the need to intensify control, generating a self-fulfilling prophecy consolidated by its own momentum. For what makes the captors the captors, even more than their enemas and rubber gags, is the unquestioned assumption that they and they alone are equipped to define what constitutes the captive's "own good." This phenomenon is encapsulated in Laing's evocation of the following hypothetical scenario.

---

41 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 154
42 *The Cold Country*, p. 18
43 *Asylums*, p. 19

> He does not think there is anything the matter with him because one of the things the matter with him is that he does not think there is anything the matter with him. Therefore we have to help him realize that the fact that he does not think there is anything the matter with him is one of the things that is the matter with him.[44]

The behaviour of Dickie's aunt complicates Cooper's discussion of the multitude of 'literal or metaphorical electronic eyes that, in the interest of some remote [...] family ideal, destructively control every ecstatic possibility' and tentative move towards liberation. [45] Since the myth of benevolence invoked to block dissent is exposed and undermined by the use of force, paradoxically Dickie's experience is preserved. Despite his aunt's "punishments," that masquerade at efforts to stop him turning into his mother, and the way in which such themes continue obliquely at Duffyn Hall, Dickie succeeds in preserving himself from the pressure of the metaphorical "eye" of normalization and control.

This is why his "unborn child" takes on such significance for him. The lives of Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* and Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* are defined by the external expectations they are cast as existing solely to embody and fulfil. The assumption prevails that with their university education behind them, the time has finally come for them to launch themselves on the world. For Dickie, however, his being there at all is solely attributable to his grandfather's miserliness and to the fact that, at the time of his conception, abortions were difficult to obtain. While in Dawson's first two novels almost everybody Josephine and Joanna ever encounter embodies the 'awful, splendid quality of having it all taped,'[46] the fate of Dickie's mother sets a precedent for what he must avoid.

---

[44] Laing, R. D., *Knots* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 5
[45] *The Death of the Family*, p. 119
[46] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 105

Although he goes through the motions of asking his father for a cheque for Zay's abortion, he never expects his request to be granted or intends the money to be spent. If it were, he would view the act as symbolically synonymous with self-annihilation, as he inextricably identifies his life with that of the incipient life under threat. Furthermore, it seems that unconsciously he wants an excuse to free himself definitively from his father for, having found Zay, he has ceased to be enslaved by his reliance on Sir Thomas's approval. Although all his life he has been 'waiting for something from his father,'[47] as he folds himself round Zay he 'no longer wanted his father. He was freed.'[48] This theme of the exchange of one form of captivity for another is a theme that Dawson explores throughout her fiction.

Sir Thomas embodies the conviction that his world alone is the one that should be striven for by all, and every aspect of his life reflects this belief. Not only does he decide which buildings should stay and which should go, regardless of the lives to be uprooted in the process, he also decides which nuclear warheads would best protect his constituents from the antics of their enemies overseas. His nonchalant orchestration of the destruction of communities by demolishing their homes is reflected microcosmically by the disregard with which he tries to destroy incipient life within the womb. Each action, or attempted action, represents the urge to have everything in its place so that anything that obstructs the plan must simply be erased. His conscience is never troubled by the "necessary" sacrifices due to the fact that he rests assured that all he does is for the common good. "'There are tragic dilemmas, you see, at the basis of all free societies,'" he blithely intones, drowning out the

---

[47] *The Cold Country*, p. 36
[48] *The Cold Country*, p. 77

dissenting voices who would rather not blast or be blasted to oblivion. '"And the people of Raumotu (where the tests are taking place) are, after all, very primitive."'[49]

Such destructive paternalism, defined by Kant as 'the greatest despotism imaginable,'[50] is typical of the institutional dynamic by which all Dawson's protagonists feel constrained. As William Seabrook, an erstwhile "patient," argues, one of the dominant overtones here is the

> back-to-kindergarten element [...]. It was a "mamma knows best" or "teacher knows best" atmosphere, protective [...], but backed up with "mamma will spank" when children became unmanageable [...]. Beaming blandly seemed to be the essence of it.[51]

This description inferentially reveals how institutional ideology has burst its bounds so that it permeates the social entity. This institutionalization of society is illustrative of Foucault's panoptic principle. Surveillance and control have become so internalized that the need not only for the application of force, but even for procedures of organized surveillance, is systematically withering away.

In *The Cold Country*, Dickie's aunt and his father seek to impose on him what Laing and Esterson call a '*Procrustean identity*,'[52] Procrustes being 'the character in Greek myth who took people of a definite natural shape and size and then either stretched or truncated their limbs'[53] to fit them to the mattress he provided. Sir Thomas however is not content with imposing a preconceived notion of identity on his son. His avidity overflows into his meddling with communities and the social space within which they exist. Instead of allowing his section of the urban to be defined spontaneously and over time by its occupants, in his megalomaniac vision

---

[49] *The Cold Country*, p. 26
[50] Quoted in Berlin, I., *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 137
[51] Seabrook, W., *Asylum* (1935), quoted in *The Faber Book of Madness*, p. 247
[52] *Sanity, Madness and the Family. An investigation into the 'forgotten illness' - schizophrenia*, p. 160
[53] *Psychopolitics*, p. 112

lives should be arranged in accordance with his hypothetical ideal of a "well-used space."

The imposition of such Procrustean identities, the motivation of the normalizing drive, has as Foucault demonstrates moved syncretically through distinct and mutually reinforcing phases. Although all are latently present simultaneously, each has its own distinct mode of activation. Although the use of force in the world that Dawson's protagonists inhabit has generally evolved into a mythology of consent, the largely displaced manifestations of force - psychiatric assaults, to name but one - continue to exist. These function as back-up, on standby to catch any stray individual who might have fallen through the net of normalization that incites collusion. In *The Cold Country*, the reason that events unleash such cascades of associations for Dickie and Zay is that power 'exists at many dispersed points, with more or less localized centers that [...] may or may not [...] coordinate with each other.'[54]

Madsen Pirie cites a proverb in which 'the wind and the sun make a wager about which of them can remove a man's cloak. As the wind blows more furiously, the man wraps his cloak ever more tightly around him, until the wind gives up [...]. Then the sun comes out and the man takes his cloak off.'[55] In *The Cold Country*, Jean and Dickie's aunt play the rôle of the wind in their tireless endeavours to subdue his spirit, while the scenarios enacted at Duffyn Hall, overseen and represented by Sir Thomas, are aligned with the tactics of the sun. Although no force is applied, Dickie is subtly incited to conform. This is the phenomenon referred to by Foucault when he states that

> power is not a substance. Neither is it a mysterious property whose origin must be delved into. Power is only a certain type of relation between individuals

---

54 May, p. 3

55 *Micropolitics*, p. 294

> [...]. The characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men's conduct - but never exhaustively or coercively. A man who is chained up and beaten is subject to force being exerted over him. Not power. But if he has been induced to speak when his ultimate recourse would have been to hold his tongue [...], then he has been caused to behave in a certain way. His freedom has been subjected to power. [...]. There is no power without potential freedom or revolt.[56]

Kundera asserts that 'wherever power deifies itself, it automatically produces its own theology; wherever it behaves like God, it awakens religious feelings towards itself.'[57]

Until he meets Zay and grows to love her, Dickie is enslaved by this deified power, embodied in the person of his father. Thus Sir Thomas's implicit self-deification (achieved through his exalted social status and his patronage of his son) evokes in Dickie a sense of reverence and the concomitant urge to prove himself worthy. His unconvincing mantra that he is valued by this power ("if he was that type I wouldn't be here") reveals the extent of his collusion in the dynamic. Critical of such a dynamic, Foucault distances himself from

> para-Marxists like Marcuse who give the notion of repression an exaggerated role - because power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it worked only through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage and repression, in the manner of a great Superego, exercising itself only in a negative way. If, on the contrary, power is strong this is because, as we are beginning to realize, it produces effects at the level of desire.[58]

Sir Thomas is never called upon to censor his son's reactions because Dickie has internalized the innate superiority of his father. His reverence, which is all the stronger for not being enforced, stems from the metaphorical need to "touch the hem of his father's robe." Dickie's sense of worship is thus shown to derive from his incitement to identify with power and enmesh himself in its "theology."

---

[56] Foucault, M., "Politics and Reason," in Kritzman, pp. 83-4
[57] *The Art of the Novel*, p. 102
[58] Foucault, M., "Body/Power," in *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, p. 59

One of Foucault's main areas of concern was the nature of 'the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.'[59] This phenomenon is further explored by Kritzman who defines power relations as 'above all, productive' so that suppression and prohibition illustrate only the limits of power and as such are symptomatic of power 'in its frustrated [...] forms.'[60] In *The Cold Country*, Dickie's is constrained by his desire to prove himself worthy of the world of Duffyn Hall, while conversely he survives unscathed the prohibitive and oppressive power represented by Jean and his aunt. This is a key development in Dawson's fiction. Whereas in *The Ha-Ha* power is most often portrayed in its manifestation as force, in *The Cold Country* its self-deification is internalized in a generative dynamic which is productive, collusive and voluntarily sustained.

It takes the abortion cheque to shatter Dickie's faith, at which point with dignity he reaches for the cloak of his autonomy which his father's world had incited him to think that he might have been better off without. Nonetheless, although he has shaken off a set of psychic shackles, he still shies away from examining his father's rôle in the destruction of the autonomy of his mother. In this, Dickie is aligned with those discussed by Laing 'who will go to incredible lengths not to realize that they are being trespassed against [...], frightened lest they be unable to forgive.'[61] In other words, 'love is not always blind. It may see just enough - to prefer the dark.'[62] Ironically and tragically, it is this reluctance to engage with the question of his father's

---

[59] Foucault, M., preface to Deleuze, G. & F. Guatarri, *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. xiv

[60] "Power and Sex," in Kritzman, L. D. (ed.), p. 118

[61] Laing, R. D., *Sonnets* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1979), p. 52

[62] *Sonnets*, p. 54

connivance in his mother's fate that blinds him to the torments being undergone by Zay.

Dickie's mission to "survive," to prove himself worthy of the life whose prerequisite was the sacrifice of his mother, makes him identify with those he defines as "the survivors" - those like his father who "make things happen," rather than with those who are at their mercy. It dawns on him only gradually that the survivors only survive because either directly or through silence or connivance they obstruct the survival of others. Because this dilemma is only resolved, or at least understood, when it's too late (too late for Zay, and hence for him as well because he loved her), the dream of salvation with and through Zay is a future built on sand.

Until he identifies the factors and culprits in his mother's decline and death, to Zay he will always seem the oppressor, unwittingly replicating the rôle of his father which ironically he is consciously seeking to subvert and for which he symbolically wants to atone. Because his preoccupation with survival prevents him from seeing the "unborn child" from Zay's perspective as well as from his own, the past repeats and perpetuates itself. Zay goes under, just as Dickie's mother did. Dawson thus implies that unless the effort is made to view the past from every possible perspective, it can never be resolved or redeemed. This is the dilemma expressed in Rubashov's inner debate in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* (1940).

> How can one change the world if one identifies with everybody?
> How else can one change it?
> He who understands and forgives - where would he find a motive to act?
> Where would he not?[63]

---

[63] Koestler, A., *Darkness at Noon*, trans. by Daphne Hardy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 25

This fundamental question, a major concern of Dawson's fiction, moves centre stage in *The Cold Country*, where faltering attempts at communion and community begin to be a central theme.

Dickie's severance of his imaginary links with his father is symbolic of his transition from the periphery of Duffyn Hall to a world of exile. This sense of exile, hitherto denied, intensifies his longing 'for Zay and his child, as though they would prove his right.' However, the fantasy Zay is displaced by the reality when she greets him with '"That money. Did you get it?"'[64] Despite their shared experience of always having been at the mercy of the events, the hope of exchange is blighted by the divergence of their past existences. These past experiences, of which their present lives are but the tip of the iceberg, create an impasse as their hidden foundations jar and block the way. He understands her anger - 'It was a situation he could entirely imagine: the frenzy and rage of finding an unwanted thing planted on him, against his will.'[65] However, the recent shattering of his faith in his father blinds him to everything except his obsession with cancelling out what he perceives as "the crime" (and concomitantly absolving him of his guilt at having survived). Although the crime of "his own" proposed abortion was never enacted, this was simply by default; as a crime of intentionality he sees it as something to be redressed.

The alien identities imposed on him throughout his life, as genetically doomed by his aunt and as worthy of pity by the guests at Duffyn Hall, are symbolically replicated by the unwanted presence implanted in Zay. For this, too, is systematically insinuating itself, usurping her from the centre of herself and making a mockery of the unencumbered entity she longs to perceive herself to be. However, although Dickie

---

64 *The Cold Country*, p. 129
65 *The Cold Country*, p. 114

has been invaded metaphorically by the sniggers that splatter his poems and by myriad more subtle attempts to curtail his rejoicing to be alive, an enema as far as we know is the only thing to have actually found its way into his body. In his eyes the "unborn child" is a symbolic testament to his survival whereas for Zay its presence signifies her own incipient destruction.

In *The Cold Country*, the collapse of dialogue between Dicks and Zay is attributable to their mutual reticence about divulging the nature of the source of their projections. Zay never discloses what her uncle did to her, and Dicks is equally silent about the random concatenation of factors enabling him to have come into being at all. For Dicks, the "unborn child" is a focus for a range of desires, primarily the desire to cement his own existence. He wants to be a saviour but in order to be a saviour he needs to have something to save. Unfortunately for Zay, her own salvation is eclipsed in Dickie's consciousness by his proposed salvation of the "unborn child." This obsessive focus on a hypothetical future, at the cost of Zay who exists in the present, mirrors Sir Thomas's dream of "urban renewal." The existing communities are less real to him and matter to him less than his vision of the clean slate of the future.

Zay: Internalization Of The Myth Of Consent

For Zay, the "unborn child" resuscitates memories of bodily invasion which symbolize her objectification as someone who can be taken and discarded, according to the taker's whim. Thus, to her it is not a potential child but a catalyst of the resurfacing of childhood assault, itself a focus for the systematic erosion of her identity. While Foucault contends that the body is a site manifesting 'the stigmata of past experience;'[66] it seems more apt to say that while the body harbours the latent stigmata of the past, these only bleed and make their presence felt when activated by echoes in the present.

If Zay had been raped or almost raped as a child and yet if nothing in her subsequent life had confirmed the self-perception engendered by this experience, the act itself would lack resonance and would therefore have less of an impact on the future. However, since the associated feelings and what evoked them are felt to be conceptually replicated in every sphere, the act has retrospectively acquired a momentous and almost mythological significance. Yet this phenomenon is complicated by the tendency for someone who has been raped to be especially attuned to the conceptual similarities between this act and acts of metaphorical invasion. Only if a pre-existing chord is there to be struck can it be struck. If psychic invasions lack this symbolic focus, they will not be experienced as cumulative consolidation of a specific event.

For Zay, her childhood desecration looms so large because conceptually it replicates itself throughout her life. Her unsuccessful stints as a 'marcasite-settler,' a model for 'Mick's Model Skirts,'[67] a seller of 'sherbert trumpets'[68] and an assistant at

---

[66] *Language, counter-memory, practice*, p. 148
[67] *The Cold Country*, p. 65

'Mellor's Garden Centre'[69] all reinforce her self-perception as someone perpetually on the verge of being discarded, and interchangeable with anyone else. Her perceived lack of agency, which has come to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, releases the impact of the past on the present. Chronology implodes when she looks at Dickie and sees 'her uncle's sticky wet smile and satisfied mouth.'[70]

Samuels, a psychoanalytic critic, defines the unconscious as 'a knowledge that does not know itself' and which therefore 'can only surface when it surprises the subject.'[71] This contextualizes the fact that for Zay the past as a metaphor for the unconscious only bursts its chronological bounds when echoes from the present reactivate it. The stigmata of her past experience bleed because of her inability to reconcile herself to anything enacted on her body. The prospect of an alien and unwilled presence emerging from her recalls the equally alien and unwanted presence that tried to find its way into her against her will when she was a child. Unable to control what finds its way into and out of her body, she feels no sense of connection with her life.

The only distinction between her uncle's intrusions and those of Dickie is one of intentionality on the behalf of the intruder, as inferred from what they imagine to constitute consent. Although, unlike her uncle, Dicks was welcomed at the time, in the aftermath of the event she comes to view as superfluous her consent or lack of it, so the centrality of intention retrospectively dissolves. For even having consented to the act, as she did with Dickie, she never consented to its aftermath which takes on a life

---

[68] *The Cold Country*, p. 73
[69] *The Cold Country*, p. 71
[70] *The Cold Country*, p. 103
[71] Samuels, R., *Between Philosophy & Psychoanalysis. Lacan's Reconstruction of Freud* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 145

of its own. When she calls him Brutus[72] she reveals that she sees him to have functioned as an instrument of her betrayal. Despite his best intentions, their outcome merely confirms a systematic consolidation of what she has come to see as the inevitable erosion and denial of her will.

When her uncle comes to gloat over her pregnancy, history repeats itself with a dreadful inevitability. She can only giggle, as she giggled as a child. On his departure, "reality" collapses. She tries to attack the "unborn child" (on whom quinine, castor oil and hot baths have had no effect) in the same way that she attacks her own reflection. '"Are you just there because I hate you? If I wanted you, you'd trickle away, but because I don't, you grow bigger every day."' She hallucinates 'tiny fingers' that 'clutch at the mouth of the drain,' followed by 'a solemn square face with a mauve lozenge eye' on either side. Having given an 'arrogant cough,'[73] echoing that of her uncle, the monster begins to chant, uncannily recapturing the chanting in the church to which she was dragged every Sunday while "in care" as a child at Bellwood Lodge. When memory thus assails her, in the form of a literal re-enactment, she reaches for the kitchen knife to bring her life to an end.

Dickie's lack of 'instinct for self-preservation'[74] (evident in his doomed desire to secure his father's approval) is manifested more intensely in Zay, situated differently within the network of power, in whom it reveals itself as an urge 'for self-destruction.'[75] These instincts are less attributable to what has been enacted on those who dramatize them than to their perceived collusion with the agents of their oppression. The irony is palpable when Dicks assures Zay, '"We'll get rid of our

---

[72] *The Cold Country*, p. 68
[73] *The Cold Country*, p. 139
[74] *The Cold Country*, p. 77
[75] *The Cold Country*, p. 85

oppressors,"'[76] for through internalization they have come to function as their own oppressors. Even Mabel, who rescued Zay from Bellwood Lodge, touches her uninvited, as if it were her due. 'The hand slipped and touched her breast. Zay turned on her.'[77] But benefactors incite a sense of loyalty, and Zay fails to muster the initiative to leave until Dicks appears on the scene and she transfers her allegiances to him. Her plaintive demand, '"Why doesn't someone tell me what to *do*?"'[78] encapsulates the habit of passivity and submission that produces the frustration that finally provokes her to elude it by bringing her life to an end.

Foucault's contention that because things 'are made they can be unmade, assuming we know how they were made'[79] is extended in Ransom's assertion that 'finding out how something is made and unmaking it are often both accomplished at the same time.'[80] In *The Cold Country*, the reason why Zay stumbles into or, arguably, activates conceptually identical situations is her failure to deconstruct the way in which her acquiescence puts her at the mercy of events. In other words, because she fails to analyse how this tendency has "been made," she denies herself the means of "unmaking it." Her sporadic attempts to break the pattern of her life are as ultimately futile as Joanna's in *Fowler's Snare*, as they only ever entail a change of "benefactor," or captor, and never a fundamental change of form.

Canetti maintains that 'if one saw the bars, one would have gained the sky between them'[81] but, since Zay has no understanding of her own participation in the construction of the bars, her failure to identify them means they obstruct her vision.

---

[76] *The Cold Country*, p. 72
[77] *The Cold Country*, p. 90
[78] *The Cold Country*, p. 92
[79] In McNeil, p. 180
[80] Ransom, p. 85

As Bettelheim contends, while the main interest of "the persecuted" is that the persecution cease, this is unlikely to happen in the absence of an understanding of 'the phenomenon of persecution, in which victim and persecutor are inseparably interlocked.'[82] In *The Cold Country*, Zay's persecution seems unending precisely because she fails to formulate the "phenomenon" and hence to subvert her rôle in the dynamic.

The fracture of power into multiple axes of constraint generates complicity not only through internalization but, more significantly, through the myth of inevitability producing and produced by the normalizing charge. Foucault proposes that the simultaneity of individualization and totalization is such a paradox that 'liberation can only come from attacking [...] rationality's very roots.'[83] Despite or perhaps because of the fact that power is diffuse, and operates in capillary form rather than along a single monolithic trajectory, Zay in *The Cold Country* fails to infer its underlying equation, and hence lacks a locus of resistance. Her keepers at Bellwood Lodge, her uncle, Mabel, and even Dickie function as conduits for her oppression because in each case she simply submits to their will.

This phenomenon is illuminated by Foucault's central argument that 'a change of state apparatus which does not address micropolitical forms of domination runs the risk of merely allowing power to change hands, rather than altering its structure.'[84] This caveat implicitly challenges the Nietzschean recommendation that if one sees a wall beginning to crumble, one should simply give it a kick to help it along. A

---

[81] Canetti, E., *The Human Province*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1985), p. 87

[82] Bettelheim, B., *The Informed Heart. Autonomy in a Mass Age* (New York: Avon Books, The Hearst Corporation, 1960), p. 214

[83] Kritzman, p. 85

[84] In May, p. 117

Foucauldian critique exposes the vacuity at the heart of such an endeavour since, unless the nature of the construction of the wall and the factors that produced it are examined and deconstructed, another wall will simply replace it, consolidating the paradigm of power.

Zay in *The Cold Country* never escapes what she sees as her fate because she fails to identify the formula that underlies her life. She longs for 'someone to change her life'[85] and, like Joanna in *Fowler's Snare*, fails to grasp that only from within can life be changed. She fails to locate or construct a perspective or interstitial space of potential freedom because constraint has come to be self-imposed. As Foucault argues, 'power is no longer a game of "inside" and "outside;"'[86] it suffuses not only the social entity but each individual component of the social ("mind-forg'd manacles" being the most effective means of pre-emptively dissolving dissent). The fractured axes along which the effects of power articulate themselves are simultaneously so diffuse and so localized that they fail to be recognized as strategic interventions but instead are accepted unquestioningly as features of the real.

Dickie, who struggles to preserve his experience with the mantra '"We're all here for some purpose,"'[87] continues to seek to see himself as the midpoint of his world. Zay, however, is ousted from the centre of herself, not only symbolically by power (in the form of the oppressive effects of other people's perceptions), but literally as well by the presence of the "unborn child." In both cases, her perceived complicity rankles and destroys her from within, whereas conversely Dicks survives because as an "unborn child" himself, when the threat of destruction was most explicit, he was not in a position to collude.

---

85 *The Cold Country*, p. 92
86 In May, p. 53

Foucault emphasizes that the panoptic principle was not just the product of architectural ingenuity but was rather 'an event in the "history of the human mind."'[88] Zay's conviction in *The Cold Country* that on no level is she the midpoint of her world implicitly poses the question of what constitutes the midpoints of the people and the structures that oppress her. Foucault's analysis of the internalization of the panoptic principle reveals that not only do components of the social mutually submit each other to unremitting normalizing surveillance but that they also normalize themselves, having internalized the panoptical central tower. When Zay complies with her uncle's demands, she is at least aware that her ostensible connivance represents a divergence from what she actually wants. However, the "benevolent" institution in which she was raised, itself a microcosm of society as a whole, established the practices of obedience and gratitude and unquestioning compliance with and submission to structures of authority.

With reference to Cooper's contention that 'the internal family goes on and on and is externally reflected in all our relationships,'[89] the function of this internalized family mirrors that of the Panopticon. Behaviour is controlled by the subliminal imposition of "consensus codes," deviation from which results in corrective normalization, purportedly for the good of the transgressor. These codes are the transmission wires of normalizing power and as such are quite distinct from ethics, as is encapsulated in Zay's uncle's assault. Dawson shows how the invocation of these codes is used to legitimize whatever those in authority choose to do, be they uncles raping nieces, psychiatric institutions lobotomizing patients, M.P.s authorizing "Urban Planning" or politicians arguing for the resumption of nuclear tests. The myth of

---

[87] *The Cold Country*, p. 88
[88] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 216

benevolence that underlies these acts pre-emptively obstructs hypothetical resistance since dissent is cast as running counter to consensus interests. This is why, as *The Cold Country* attests, there can often seem no option but to consent.

While power is a dynamic network of charges continually engaged in a process of negotiation, with each containing the latent capacity for revolt, each individual, by dint of distinctions of status and circumstance, is situated differently within the web of its intersecting strands. Power tends to resist formulation because of its fluidity and reliance on collusion. In this context, Bordo invokes a Foucauldian critique to cast light on the rôle of gender in how individuals are situated within the web of power for while, as she argues, the game can never be definitively controlled, 'not all players on the field are equal.' Her application of a Foucauldian analysis emphasizes the factor of collusion in the phenomenon of 'male dominance and female subordination, so much of which, in a modern Western context, is reproduced "voluntarily," through self-normalization to everyday habits.'[90]

In *The Cold Country*, although both Zay and Dickie are marginal to a degree, each occupies a distinct location within the network of power. Although Dickie is subject to imposed definitions, subjectively this imposition resonates less than it does for Zay, unmirrored as it is by perceptions of his gender and bodily presence. Despite his best intentions, when he tells her, '"You're human first,"'[91] this, perhaps, is something that only a man could say.

In his discussion of the case of Schreber, Sass contends that imaginary 'transformation into a woman implies losing in the competition of consciousness, ceding one's epistemological centrality and becoming a mere object defined by the

---

[89] *The Death of the Family*, p. 109
[90] In McNeil, M., *Dancing with Foucault*, p. 191

other's [...] awareness.'[92] Such a transformation, however, while no doubt a valid representation of a particular state of mind, cannot capture the essence of existing as a woman as it fails to consider the cumulative effect of external perceptions, which are what produce the experience in the first place.

A sense of novelistic irony is engendered by the juxtaposition of events that were temporally distinct. Dickie, lost in his fantasies of vicarious self-salvation, is blissfully unaware of the intrusions of Zay's past into her present and thus fails to register her response. Where he sees a saved child, symbol of the consolidation of his own survival, she sees

> her aunt sitting against the sea-wall, knitting. Grey sky. Grey sea. Zay and her uncle creeping out over the pebbles [...]. He put one foot round her waist, and the other between her legs [...]. She was underneath him and he was very strong. The water rose and echoed in her ears. The ocean spoke, and she ran down and down a plug, and pulled herself up again, choking. But she was his guest, and even if it had been a field, she would not have known that there are in fact some rules when your uncle tries to rape you, even if he did pay for the petrol and lunch. She giggled politely:
> "Hey! What are you up to?" and never stopped being angry with herself over this. Her skin, her pride, her position as a guest, made her connive.[93]

This image of being reduced to nothing and disappearing down a plug recalls Dickie's sensation that the guests at Duffyn Hall 'turned a tap on and ran him away' until he felt 'there would be nothing left.'[94] In this they are aligned, but the source of the disjunction is not only the nature of the experience itself but also the rôle of collusion or, more to the point, the rôle of perceived collusion. In a recent article, Alcoff argued that

> the concept of consent is sometimes a useful abstraction that can help to clarify what happened and to articulate the presence or absence of coercion, but it has only a limited ability to capture the nature of sexual [or any other]

---

91 *The Cold Country*, p. 72
92 Sass, p. 123
93 *The Cold Country*, p. 101
94 *The Cold Country*, p. 46

> experience. Furthermore, from a position of moral concern [...], what one needs to know is not whether there was stated consent, but whether the actions performed represented the authentic desires of each participant.[95]

In *The Cold Country*, the imposed feeling of being at the mercy of others (intensified by the interplay of the forces of age and "class" which are further potential indicators of marginality) is shown to attract events that are seen to confirm this belief. The situation thus consolidates itself. Its perceived inevitability induces a sense of collusion which renders the imagined inevitability actual and thus adds momentum to the self-fulfilling prophecy.

The uneasy alliance between the prescribed games of childhood and the overt intrusion of an adult game forms the background of the scene of Zay's perceived complicity. 'She stood by the breakwater and played with her yo-yo, the sea in her ears, and lips coming at her [...]. "And thanks to the driver for bringing us safely home," she replied and never forgave herself.' She 'never forgave herself for not having killed him.'[96] Here the Foucauldian distinction between power and force informs the world of the novel. When Zay was attacked, she was subject to force as the act precluded negotiation. However, her reaction in the aftermath of the event is illustrative of the more insidious hold exerted by power, since she was induced to behave in a certain way by vague intimations of "the rules."

One of the effects of micropolitical power is its subliminal imposition of intimations of these rules, mystification as to whose nature is most effective if they can be presented as under the jurisdiction of the agents of their abuse. Zay's reaction of "playing along" represents a confused attempt to preserve "her pride" and to counter her loss of control. For portraying herself as having been "willing" or "to

---

[95] Alcoff, L. M., "Dangerous Pleasures: Foucault and the Politics of Pedophilia," in Hekman, p. 121
[96] *The Cold Country*, pp. 101-2

blame" perhaps seems preferable to perceiving her will or lack of it as having had no impact on the unfolding of events.

In her youth, as a child 'in need of care,'[97] she was sent to a South London hostel for 'girls in need of "protection, guidance or re-education." Most of them came from the courts. A lot were pregnant.'[98] It seems doubtful whether any of the products of Bellwood Lodge, associated by Zay with roasting chickens, 'white and trussed and turning,'[99] would consider it their place to question the advances of an uncle validated by picnic hamper and car. The image of the relentlessness of the chickens' torture for Zay brings Bellwood Lodge to mind when she finds herself exposed to her uncle's advances. As Doctorow argues, the institution is characterized by its incapacity for surprise,[100] a characteristic aligning it with the applications of force rather than power. For Zay, as for the chickens with whom she identifies herself, there seems no possibility of either negotiation or escape. In her childhood, no privacy existed, either inside or outside her body. This is the context in which Goffman, a critic of institutions, maintains that individuals within them undergo 'mortification of the self' through 'forced interpersonal contact' and 'contaminative exposure.' Thus the inmate 'loses control over who observes him' or 'knows about his past.'[101]

When Zay is attacked, her lack of control over who can access her as a case study is compounded by her lack of control over who can access her body. Her Pavlovian recitation of the clichés of gratitude is produced by the subliminally imposed idea that anything administered by "those in the know" is both above question and, however obscurely, "for her own good." Laing contends that 'much

---

97 *The Cold Country*, p. 65
98 *The Cold Country*, p. 86
99 *The Cold Country*, p. 100
100 Doctorow, E.L., *The Waterworks* (London: McMillan London Ltd., 1994), p. 221

human behaviour can be seen as unilateral or bilateral attempts to eliminate experience. A person may treat another *as though* he were not a person.'[102] The true violence thus lies less in its actual form than in the fact that the person thus treated is all too likely to absorb and assimilate the message. Elsewhere, Laing argues that if one succumbs to collusion

> one becomes estranged from one's self and is guilty thereby of self-betrayal. If one does not take fright at experiencing oneself as engulfed by the other, resent being "used," or in some way rebel against collusion, then under pressure from a false guilt one may become, as one may feel, the unwilling accomplice or victim of the other, although being "the victim" may also be an act of collusion.[103]

Zay in *The Cold Country* is less affected by the memory of what actually occurred when she was a child than by how she was induced to collude. She could not have altered the course of events but she could have withheld her implied retrospective consent. It is in this context that May, the Foucauldian critic, highlights the fact that resistance and connivance are often hard to distinguish, enmeshed as they are 'in a complex of relations often difficult to disentangle.'[104]

The episode with Zay and her uncle encapsulates the way in which the discourse of the paternalistic society operates. This world, overseen by people like Sir Thomas and represented in more primitive form by institutions like Bellwood Lodge and the "hospital" where Dickie's mother spends her final days, implants the notion that only "those in the know" can define and articulate the desires of those they purport to represent. This phenomenon is conveyed with intensity when Zay is

---

[101] *Asylums*, p. 35
[102] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 82
[103] *Self and Others*, p. 111
[104] May, p. 120

bombarded from every quarter by eulogies on the joys of motherhood. 'A feeling of powerlessness was coming over her, and she had no tongue.'[105]

As a child, her tongue was metaphorically controlled by internalized intimations of how she should behave in the presence of someone posing as her benefactor. The resulting sensations of disembodiment and self-estrangement are similar to those experienced by Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* and described by Sartre as encapsulating ontological fracture. 'I thought I had two voices; one - which hardly belonged to me and was not dependent on my will - was dictating to the other what to say.'[106] Now, in adulthood, Zay's tongue is paralyzed altogether since silence seems her only means of withholding what she perceives as her connivance. In neither case are her authentic desires articulated, and she is reduced to a canvas for events. The surrender symbolized by her retreat into silence is foreshadowed in the novel by the fate of Dickie's mother whose withdrawal from language prefigures her withdrawal from her life.

Power's interlocking and proliferating strands, mutating where necessary into those of force, induce Dawson's protagonists to entrust their destinies to representatives of the normalizing drive. Dickie seeks approval at Duffyn Hall, his mother surrenders to the decisions of her keepers, the populace (*pace* a few dissenting voices) authorizes politicians to make decisions in its name and Zay submits to her uncle's assault. This is the phenomenon outlined in Foucault's analysis of the simultaneously diffuse and compact nature of the constraining effects of the normalizing drive. These produce a 'carceral archipelago'[107] whose influence not only traverses the whole of society but is internalized as a conceptual continuum by every

---

105 *The Cold Country*, p. 119
106 *Words*, p. 136

component of the social. The question of consent is a minefield when conformity is so internalized that it fails to be recognized as such and is experienced instead in the form of spontaneous desires. This is the context in which Foucault argues that iron chains are a less effective means of constraint that the chain of people's own ideas, a chain 'which is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work.'[108]

Zay in *The Cold Country* is silenced by her ignorance of a means of expressing a refusal to comply with her contentious rôle in the dynamic. This dilemma reveals the complicity between the effects of power and those of knowledge, whose synonymity and interchangeability Foucault was at pains to deny. For if knowledge is appropriated by power, it is 'always after the fact'[109] and is thus only 'one of the stakes in the struggle by various forces for domination.'[110] As Zay's situation testifies, knowledge can be annexed by power as a means for power to articulate and disseminate itself. The relationship is thus not one of mirroring but of the expression in one register of something that has a different style of existence in another. While neutral in itself, knowledge can be colonized by power, enabling power to realize itself.

Power has no essence; it is simply operational, functioning as the zero unit does. Although it is "nothing" since it lacks both a centre and substance, without it nothing could exist. It is its status as "nothing" that constitutes its identity for, without a concept of nothing, there couldn't be a concept of anything else. Power as the "zero unit" activates the circulation of discourses of knowledge that underpin the normalizing drive and keep people in their place. However those who neither identify

---

[107] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 301
[108] *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 102-3
[109] May, T., p. 38
[110] May, T., p. 75

with their place nor feel they have consented to the manner in which they've been placed there experience, as Zay does, feelings of estrangement not least from themselves.

In *The Cold Country*, Zay's loss of agency, which severs her from her experience, is encapsulated when she surveys her reflection. 'She went to the mirror and stared at her face: "That's not me." She slapped it with rage.'[111] This reaction recalls the vandalism of the hospital mirror in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*, symbolic of the patients' self-loathing, and representing their internalization of how they are perceived. 'The self-hatred of hundreds and hundreds of patients had been vented on it [...]. Even the weaponless had found weapons to scratch it and dent it and no inch of its surface was clear.'[112] Similarly in *The Cold Country* Dickie's mother's self-starvation replicates literally her metaphorical reduction by Sir Thomas to something that ought not to be there at all.

---

111 *The Cold Country*, p. 72

112 *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*, p. 138

Miss Dicks: The Internalization Of Marginalization On The Social-Psychiatric Continuum

The fate of Dickie's mother in the novel conceptually and chronologically presages the fate of Zay a generation later since both are destroyed by normalizing power. Zay's hallucinations of 'her own labour cries, as though the male sex had devoted itself to that end alone'[113] bring to mind Dickie's mother who is also cast as a "necessary sacrifice," not only microcosmically to Sir Thomas' career but also to the functioning of society as a whole, synecdochally overseen by him.

Deleuze maintains that power-relations 'do not emanate from a central point or unique locus of sovereignty'[114] but rather that they are in a constant state of flux and can at any moment mutate into those of force. Miss Dicks, who is initially oppressed by social codes alone, becomes subject on her hospitalization to applications of force. By reinforcing those of power, these make manifest her acquisition of victim identity. The "hospital" represents what McNay has defined as a state of 'domination, characterized by power relations which are asymmetrical and irreversible.'[115] Miss Dicks internalizes society's salacious disapproval of a working-class woman who has dared to have a child by a man outside her class, to the point at which her "sin" becomes 'a florid preoccupation.'[116]

> "They're going to "do" me soon," she whispered. "And I hope it kills me."
> [...]
> "The op.," the nurse corrected, oiling the tubes. "Going to get rid of some of that nasty grey matter, eh, Miss Dicks?" [...]
> "The punishment," Miss Dicks repeated with ghostly stubborn glee. "Cut my brains," she burned. "I hope it gets me."[117]

---

113 *The Cold Country*, p. 131
114 *Foucault*, p. 73
115 McNay, L., *Foucault and Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 67
116 *The Cold Country*, p. 39
117 *The Cold Country*, p. 42

In the same way, Virginia, the protagonist of Ward's *The Snake Pit*, expresses her predicament in this logical register. Being in a "hospital" feels so like a punishment (even the E.C.T. suggesting death by execution) that she comes to perceive herself as someone accused of a crime. Similarly, Zay retrospectively concocts the cover-story of her collusion rather than confront the issue of the use of force. Yet in neither case is the self-delusion complete. Virginia later admits that 'she had invented the prison fantasy. All along she had known where she was, but she had invented a setting that was easier to endure.'[118] Frame, too, in *Faces in the Water*, shows how the "patients" interpret their "treatment" (destruction of their experience by the psychiatric machine) as practice for the destruction of their lives.

> We know the rumours attached to E.S.T. - it is training for Sing Sing when we are [...] sentenced to death and sit strapped in the electric chair with the electrodes touching our skin through slits in our clothing; our hair is singed as we die and the last smell in our nostrils is the smell of ourselves burning.[119]

Not only are these "delusions" contextually intelligible but even the mode of destruction is the same. The overlap between "therapeutic" and overtly punitive and disciplinary strategies is informed by the continuum implied by Foucault in *Madness and Civilization* and *Discipline and Punish*. Whether transgression is from legality or sanity, it activates the normalizing drive. Furthermore, just as criminality consolidates legality, "madness" validates "civilization" by functioning as its conceptual antithesis. In each case, the assumption is challenged that power and resistance are ontologically distinct.

When Miss Dicks in *The Cold Country* conceives of her imminent lobotomy as a punishment, her choice of register reveals her awareness of what at a deeper level is underway. Laing notes that psychiatric patients resistant to public definitions of

---

118 *The Snake Pit*, p. 48

their rôle are further invalidated by the subsequent diagnosis that they are prey to delusions of persecution by psychiatric attempts to deny that they are being persecuted.[120] Dickie's mother ostensibly confounds these techniques of mystification by not, as might be expected, resenting persecution but by instead embracing it in exaggerated form. Cooper contends that in such cases the imposition of the label "mental patient" eclipses the real conspiracy with the 'false conspiracy' of paranoid "illness." [121] Miss Dicks's coded insight into the equally coded "real conspiracy" is manipulated by the rhetoric of benevolence into further evidence of the "false conspiracy" of her illness. In the name of benevolence, Laing argues, the destruction of experience must be disguised by 'a false consciousness, inured [...] to its own falsity.' Persecution need not be dismissed as a delusion; instead 'it should be experienced as kindness.'[122] As a pre-emptive pseudo-justification, all institutions implicitly invoke this myth.

The Szaszian definition of psychiatry as 'the sewer into which modern societies discharge their insoluble moral and social problems'[123] is equally applicable to "hostels for wayward girls." Both ignore root causes and are characterized by mystification as to their function. This phenomenon is encapsulated by the semantic contortions in the range of euphemisms from "protection, guidance and re-education" to "the op.," with "re-education" in particular connoting the atrocities of the Gulags. However, "the institution," as formulated by Szasz and Laing, which merely represents the overt assaults of power, has, as Foucault demonstrates, so insinuated

---

119 *Faces in the Water*, p. 23
120 *The Politics of the Family*, p. 68
121 *The Grammar of Living*, p. 62
122 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 49
123 *The Untamed Tongue*, p. 178

itself, syncretically and micropolitically, into every sphere, that it is now a diagnostic of the social.

Dickie's mother's "grey matter," symbol of the vestiges of her autonomy (and of her sense of herself as the "midpoint of her world") is dismissed by the psychiatrists as a troublesome inconvenience. Here, again, a parallel is evident between these attitudes and those of Sir Thomas, who wants to demolish communities (as well as an incipient life) that threaten to obstruct his "social plan." Frame, in *Faces in the Water*, draws the same analogy: 'Now that my personality had been condemned, like a slum dwelling, the planners were at work.'[124] 'The central storehouse [...] was to be [...] demolished.'[125]

As Foucault demonstrates, rather than functioning as an isolated pocket of abuse, the psychiatric machine both focuses and makes manifest a wide range of social operations which are mutually reinforcing on a microcosmic as well as on a macrocosmic level. Laing, too, blurs these distinctions when he argues that the final solution of lobotomy is only required when '*normal social* lobotomy' has failed.[126] In other words, he posits a continuum, with psychiatric atrocities literalizing metaphorical social operations.

In *The Cold Country*, the sacrifice of Zay metaphorically and of Dickie's mother literally to a wider social plan is a phenomenon contextualized by the Szaszian definition of the removal of anything that protests or resists as the final solution of 'humanectomy.'[127] Elsewhere, Szasz quotes the medical "ethicists" Jonsen and Eichelman, allowing them to damn themselves. "It is the nature of psychiatry to work

---

[124] *Faces in the Water*, p. 216
[125] *Faces in the Water*, p. 219
[126] *The Politics of the Family*, p. 91
[127] *The Second Sin*, p. 62

with patients who suffer from impaired perceptions of themselves and the world. It is an impairment of the "consenting organ" itself which is being treated."[128] In the case of Miss Dicks, what is in fact being treated is the exaggerated form of her consent which cannot be permitted as it so overtly indicates the nature of the game.

The harnessing of "the medical" as an agent of normalization, through the semantic mystification of the paternalistic discourse, finds its apex in the co-opting of medicine under régimes like those of Hitler and Stalin. These are the concerns that motivate and underlie the Laingian opposition to conventional psychiatry, which he saw as 'political rather than psychological.' He refers to it as 'a means of controlling people' and putting "nuisances" out of the way by 'destroying their capacity to be their own obnoxious selves.'[129] Psychiatry's rôle as agent of social normalization is encapsulated by Sargent's definition of leucotomy as a device for rendering "patients" more 'open to suggestion and persuasion without [...] resistance.' Once the mind has been 'freed from its old straitjacket,' new 'beliefs and attitudes can [...] more easily take the place of the old.'[130] Ironically in *The Cold Country* Dickie's mother takes to extremes of mimicry subliminal messages about her worthlessness. Although she withdraws from life long before her physiological death, the lobotomy that kills her is the "punishment" for this indecent display of the symptoms of over-zealous internalization. Her response, or non-response, recalls that of Kate, Mercer's Laingian prototype discussed in chapter one, who proclaims in ironic triumph, 'You can't get at

---

[128] Jonsen, A. R. & B. Eichelman, cited in Szasz, T., *Insanity. The Idea and its Consequences* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 105

[129] Friedenberg, p. 44

[130] Sargent, W., *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 138-9

me when I don't exist.'[131] Dickie's mother, caught in an impasse, seems to feel that relinquishing existence is a small price to pay to be left alone.

Only about death does she display enthusiasm, just as this is the only time when Zay shows intimations of autonomy. In the aftermath of what Laing called the holocaust of experience at the altar of conformity,[132] actual death is experienced as a release. The fate of Dickie's mother is contextualized by Foucault's assertion that 'civilization, in a general way, constitutes a milieu favourable to the development of madness.'[133] It is the normalizing drive of "civilization" that produces a pathology of all that resists it and of all that it fails to subsume. Foucault maintains that "madness" lacks 'the right to autonomy, and can live only grafted onto the world of reason.'[134] This contention calls into question whether this "world of reason" could be conceptually constructed and sustained were it not for the "graftings on" that delineate its boundaries and validate its ostensible purpose of seeking to subsume them into the body of reason itself.

The Szaszian assertion that the "depressed" person commands: '"You must dominate me: hate me, punish me,"'[135] while 'the psychotic plays lost sheep - forcing people to be his shepherd'[136] misses the point by ignoring the rôle of initial accountability. In *The Cold Country*, Dickie's mother has been "dominated" and "punished" to such an extent that only psychiatric intervention prevents her from ending her life. Her social persecution has reduced her to the desire that this pattern be pursued to its conclusion and she longs for a literal death to obliterate the traces of her

---

131 *In Two Minds*, p. 81
132 *The Politics of the Family*, p. 90
133 *Madness and Civilization*, p. 217
134 *Madness and Civilization*, p. 252
135 *The Second* Sin, p. 91
136 *The Untamed Tongue*, p. 121

metaphorical one. Contrary to Szasz's assumption that from the outset the "depressive" has called the shots, the "depressive behaviour" displayed by Dickie's mother is more indicative of response than of stimulus. It represents compliance with the promotion of dependency and its source is her internalization of social attitudes.

Although until her lobotomy she has never been *identifiably* "punished," the source of her obsessive preoccupation with having "sinned" is what Foucault refers to as the 'invisible tribunal in permanent session.'[137] As in *The Trial*, it is 'a matter of countless subtleties in which the Court is lost sight of. And in the end, out of nothing at all, an enormous fabric of guilt will be conjured up.'[138] Mably's formulation (cited by Foucault) that ideally power 'should strike the soul rather than the body'[139] is taken one step further by Miss Dicks whose "punishment," by means of internalization, is inflicted *by* the soul as well as on it. The Foucauldian adage that the soul is the prison of the body inverts the cliché to present "the soul" as a discursive construct invoked to sanctify the imposed internalization of the normalizing drive. Through this political manœuvre, enforced submission to external codes is experienced spontaneously as conscience. Since power, as opposed to force, implies collaboration, its ontological violence takes the form not of an assault but of a seduction. Collusion replaces compulsion, unless compulsion is activated by the refusal to comply (a factor which acts as a binding agent within the complicitous bond).

Having been systematically estranged from herself, Dickie's mother, like Zay, succumbs to acquiescence. The continuum of the social and the psychiatric discourse then concoct a retrospective self-fulfilling prophecy that casts their interventions as having been required. The cover-story thus insinuates itself as an indicator of the real.

---

[137] *Madness and Civilization*, p. 265

[138] Kafka, F., *The Trial*, trans. by Willa & Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p. 12

In this context, a Foucauldian micropolitical critique of the processes of normalization reveals the terms in which epistemology casts itself to be 'politically charged from the outset.'[140] Psychiatric paternalism is brought into focus when Dicks observes that 'for years she had wanted to die. For years she had been prevented, with nasal feeds, catheters, stomach-pumps, and whoops-a-daisy, over she goes [...] because of the sacredness of life. Only they were allowed to take it.'[141] This recalls Virginia's observation in *The Snake Pit* that 'the Jailer' in the "hospital" is 'under the impression that he is the only one [...] permitted to kill me.' [142] The infantilization of the patients, a diagnostic and prerequisite of paternalism, is aptly illustrated by this "whoops-a-daisy, over she goes" approach, invoked to uphold the myth of benevolence. Virginia in *The Snake Pit* also notes the radical disjunction between their 'good mornings and how are you' and the nurse advancing to put 'clamps on your head [...], your hands tied down, your legs held down. Three against one, and the one entangled in machinery.'[143] The use of force in psychiatric institutions thus renders literal the metaphorical machinery of power.

A Foucauldian analysis of power's syncretic transition from monolithic sovereignty to its current micropolitical formulations (the shift from the dynastic to the dynamic) illuminates the radical disparity of reality and purported intentions. Since micropolitical democratization multiplies the channels through which a phenomenon is applied, normalizing strategies surround and infiltrate consciousness to such an extent that they finally come to define it. This is the context in which Foucault argues that the perfection of power should 'render its actual exercise

---

139 *Discipline and Punish*, p. 16
140 May, p. 59
141 The *Cold Country*, p. 44
142 *The Snake Pit*, p. 191

unnecessary' as social subjects become enmeshed in 'a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.'[144] In a micropolitical society, contemporary scapegoats, required to preserve the integrity of the group, activate "benevolent" normalization rather than simply being expelled. However, power in its pre-micropolitical manifestations continues to be held in reserve. In her fiction, Dawson shows how force, as displayed in psychiatric institutions, exists simultaneously with the mystifying discourse of the therapeutic state. Both Dickie in *The Cold Country* and Virginia in *The Snake Pit* are struck by this ostensibly incongruous juxtaposition. Whether or not to consent to the normalizing drive is in effect a false choice, since not to consent carries a penalty implicit in the rules of the social game. One of the guises this penalty takes is that of psychiatric intervention.

Although lack of money was a factor in the survival of Dickie as an "unborn child," the novel gives no indication of the feelings of Miss Dicks about the matter. In fact, as inferred from the conduct of Sir Thomas, it seems doubtful whether she was consulted. Her gleeful anticipation of the removal of her "grey matter," which she prophetically believes will kill her, prefigures Zay's desperation for the "unborn child" to be "removed." However, whereas Miss Dicks resents her brain for sustaining the parody of identity to which she has been reduced, Zay experiences this process in reverse. Feeling her identity to be under threat from the presence of the "unborn child," she prefers the thought of death to that of submitting to the final ousting of herself as the midpoint of her world. Circumstances having already metaphorically undermined her location at the centre of her life, the unwanted presence inside her

---

[143] *The Snake Pit*, pp. 40-1

[144] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 291

confirms in literal terms the tenuousness of her position. The only time she acts as the midpoint of her life is when she takes it.

This act of self-destruction chronologically condenses the sustained passivity of Dickie's mother's enactment of her prolonged suicide. Such "masochism," in fact an internalization of the forces of the world, echoes the case in Green's *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* of the patient who practises 'horrible tortures on himself.' When asked why, he replies, '"Why, before the world does them [...]. It always comes at last, but this way at least I am master of my own destruction."' When asked what became of him, the doctor reports that '"the Nazis came and they put him into Dachau and he died there."'[145] For psychiatric patients, or anyone otherwise reduced to passivity, it is not so much that acts of self-destruction can seem to be the only possible gesture of autonomy as that, since their ontological destruction is already implicit in the plan, the only way of acting autonomously can seem to be through control of the *tempo* or the *mode* of their destruction.

The theme of Dawson's first two novels, the impact on the subject of the normalizing strategies by means of which conformity is promoted and maintained, is extended in *The Cold Country* which engages more explicitly with the way these strategies operate within a social context. When the nurse raises the prospect of Dickie's mother's lobotomy, she combines the myth of benevolence with the reality of expediency, echoing the rhetoric invoked to ease the imposition of wider social plans, be they of nuclear testing or of demolition of the community space. Her assurance that '"It's in her own interests"' is belied by the afterthought that '"the surgeon can't be kept waiting, and it's a long way down from London, and he won't come down [...]

---

145 *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden*, p. 38

for less than four.'"[146] The economic imperative takes precedence in the same way that so-called debates about nuclear weapons are largely confined to concerns about the arms bill.

Institutions are characterized by mathematics, as Krim maintains in his recollections of life in an asylum. 'You must find a common denominator of categorization and treatment in order to handle the battalions of miscellaneous humanity that are marched past your desk.'[147] This "mathematical approach," whose apex was manifested in the extermination camps, contextualizes the rise in the use of E.C.T., which superseded its predecessors insulin and Metrazol shock treatment as it was 'more economical' and 'simpler to administer.' 'A single physician, using E.C.T., could shock thirty patients in under two hours.'[148]

Frame's observation that '"for your own good" is a persuasive argument that will eventually make man agree to his own destruction'[149] is shown in *The Cold Country* to operate on the social as well as on the individual level. On the subject of the resumption of nuclear testing, the Prime Minister assures the populace that while it was a difficult decision, '"We must be ruled by the good of the whole."'[150] Jean, Dickie's cousin, takes up this refrain in her enthusiasm for the euphemistically entitled "Civil Defence." '"We've got to serve the people [...]. It's for your own good."'[151] Dickie feels his 'strength ebb'[152] and feels the same paralysis that struck him in the wake of his mother's death. Doctorow's contention that we are now enmeshed in 'a double-think system' rather than being subject to 'ordinary

---

146 *The Cold Country*, p. 43
147 Krim, S., "View of a Nearsighted Cannoneer" in *The Faber Book of Madness*, p. 517
148 Geller & Harris, *Women of the Asylum* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994), p. 258
149 *Faces in the Water*, p. 72
150 *The Cold Country*, p. 24
151 *The Cold Country*, p. 16

repression'[153] is encapsulated in Dawson's novel by the ceaseless invocation of the phrase "the good of the whole," a device employed to pre-emptively dissolve dissent. The rhetoric of consensus defines the micropolitical stage of the systematic consolidation of power. Pilger illuminates Doctorow's assertion when he defines the "double-think system" as one of 'censorship by subterfuge: the manipulation of thought and language' by 'labels and clichés' designed to instil a 'deference to authority' and to the 'prevailing view in the name of objectivity.'[154] Steiner extends this argument, that Dawson explores in *The Cold Country*, when he equates the linguistic falsification that underlies totalitarianism with the 'consensus-propaganda of consumer technocracies. We live under a constant wash of mendacity. Millions of words tide over us' devoid of any 'intent of clear meaning.'[155] Instead the intent is distortion of "the real" through obfuscation and ultimately erosion of the link between signifiers and signified.

In *The Cold Country* "the good of the whole" refers to the mantra of compliance, chanted in exchange for the reward of safety in numbers, a phenomenon challenging Steiner's argument that the language of consensus-propaganda suffers from a deficit of any clear meaning. Instead Dawson implies that it insidiously establishes a new set of meanings, imposed within a welter of denied contradictions.

Dickie's interpretation of his mother's death aligns psychiatric violence, exemplified by lobotomy (linguistically sanitized as "the op.") with political violence, exemplified by the nuclear bomb (linguistically established as "deterrence"). Dawson describes his reaction as that of 'a true son of nuclear deterrence' who simply 'grinned

---

[152] *The Cold Country*, p. 16
[153] Doctorow, E.L., *The Book of Daniel* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1982), p. 143
[154] Pilger, J., *Heroes* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986), p. xiii

and bore it.'[156] The sense of estrangement, the source of passivity, is shown to be engendered by linguistic contortions which misrepresent reality to the point where people finally come to mistrust their own mistrust.

Pilger's definition of the history of nuclear weapons as 'a history of the exercise of secrecy, of keeping information not from an enemy but from the people the weapons were meant to defend'[157] resonates with Goffman's reference to the inmate's characteristic exclusion from the decisions that are made about his fate.[158] The juxtaposition of these two statements in the nuclear age further confounds the distinction between the institution and society as a whole. The only conceptual disparity is that one is an arena for the application of force while the other is a network of the transmission wires of power. However, force can also operate in pockets *within* the social space, as exemplified in *The Cold Country* by the relentless encroachment of "urban renewal,"[159] a euphemism in the same vein as "Civil Defence."

When Dickie surveys the 'chairs and bedsteads,' the 'lino and old mangles [...], a frying pan' and 'an old handbag,'[160] this residue of lives uprooted by "urban renewal" recalls the inventory compiled by the hospital of the residue of the life of Miss Dicks, who was also tacitly sacrificed to a plan. In the same dazed state, he reads 'One bed jacket. One small battery lamp shaped like an owl. One pathfinder hymnal. Sixteen curlers.'[161] The parallel is extended in the juxtaposition of the ghoulish glee of

---

[155] Steiner, G., *Extra-Territorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), p. 96
[156] *The Cold Country*, p. 45
[157] Pilger, pp. 493-4
[158] *Asylums*, p. 19
[159] *The Cold Country*, p. 119
[160] *The Cold Country*, p. 149
[161] *The Cold Country*, p. 45

the demolition company's sign: "'Watch it come down!'"[162] and the salaciousness with which Dickie's mother awaits the lobotomy that kills her.

The community animates the social space as the "grey matter" animates the human subject. When the animating force is removed, only an array of disparate objects testifies that it was ever there. Zay, like Miss Dicks, whose experience has already been destroyed, longs for the demolition process to finish her off. 'Bricks foamed and gushed out of basement windows. She stared greedily as though it could be hers, this vomit, and shovelling away.'[163] Although the hospital takes the knife to Miss Dicks whereas Zay takes the knife to herself, each knife is metaphorically wielded by the mutually consolidating social abuses inflicted by the normalizing drive.

---

[162] *The Cold Country*, p. 113
[163] *The Cold Country*, p. 131

Civil Defence: Internalization of Consensus And Consolidation Of The Group

The development of Dawson's fiction reveals a move away from clear-cut distinctions between "oppressors" and "oppressed" in favour of presenting more complex relationships, not least between the present and the past. Moreover, the contextual thematic overlap no longer serves the purpose of simple reinforcement. This can be seen in *The Cold Country* in the way that a given phenomenon unleashes and illuminates a range of responses from one character to the next as well as structurally. For example, whereas Zay's experience is destroyed by her perceived complicity with the internalized codes of "those in the know," in the novelistic realm of the social "the people," who constitute the concept of the majority, are conversely sustained by the same internalization mechanism.

The popularity of Civil Defence in the novel illustrates how the habit of destruction, whether it be of individuals or communities, is so ingrained that the populace readily consents to the prospect even of its own potential destruction. This phenomenon is contextualized by the crucial question posed by Deleuze: 'How is it that people whose interests are not being served can strictly support the existing power structure by demanding a piece of the action?'[164] *The Cold Country* shows how in a culture of dependency social subjects feel relieved to entrust their destinies to "those in the know" for whom the assumed status of *being* in the know has come to be an end in itself.

---

164 *Language, counter-memory, practice*, p. 214

Laing maintains that 'a social norm may come to impose an oppressive obligation on everyone, although few people feel it to be their own.'[165] This contention both informs and is confounded by the response of the characters in *The Cold Country* who never question whether "the social norm" is their own, having ceded responsibility to an internalized "majority" conceived of as synonymous with a higher authority. The fear of falling foul of "the group" is played on in the novel by the snide rejoinders habitually employed to invalidate intimations of dissent.

> "How serious we are all getting."
> "It must be the effect of all these little sausages! Mrs. Mitchum must have nationalized them [...]."
> "Turned them all nuclear disarmament, or anti whatever it is."[166]

Such attitudes highlight power's transition from a monolithic and repressive presence to a democratized entity that manifests itself by generating identification with the tyranny of the discourse of the internalized *status quo*. As de Tocqueville notes, whereas 'the authority of a king is physical,' controlling the actions without subduing the will, 'the majority possesses a power [...] which acts upon the will as much as upon the actions, and represses not only all contests but all controversy.'[167]

When the hypothetical majority is internalized, as when "Civil Defence" becomes the rallying cry in the novel, surveillance is shown to have reached the final stage of Foucauldian subjugation. The 'invisible eye' of society develops syncretically into 'the inaudible voice of the human herd.'[168] This need not exist externally to the subject and is manifested in *The Cold Country* when the populace need no longer even be duped let alone coerced into submission. Consensus-propaganda being accepted as

---

165 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 65
166 *The Cold Country*, p. 34
167 de Tocqueville, A., *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 273
168 Konwicki, T., *A Minor Apocalypse*, trans. by Richard Lourie (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1984), p. 144

truth, they submit voluntarily, mistaking submission for the expression of their spontaneous demands.

In this context, Konwicki notes with irony that 'we have taken ourselves prisoner and we're keeping ourselves behind bars [...]. We've given the oppressor the slip. We've outwitted him [...] because we have imposed our own slavery.'[169] Likewise, Connolly defines Fraternity as 'the State's bribe to the individual.' He blurs the distinction between the power of "the State" and the power of the internalized majority when he contends that all State propaganda 'exalts comradeship for it is this herd-sense and herd-smell which keep people from thinking and so reconcile them to [...] destruction.'[170] Jung casts light on this phenomenon, a defining concern of Dawson's fiction, when he observes with irony that 'where the many are there is security; what the many believe must of course be true; what the many want must be worth striving for, and necessary, and therefore good.'[171] Whether or not this "many" exists has long ceased to matter; what matters is that it exists as an idea.

In *The Cold Country*, the abstraction of "the many" is counter-balanced and sporadically over-ridden by the specificity and concreteness of diversionary concerns, as when it is seen as a foregone conclusion that quotidian minutiae should eclipse the fate of the planet. Dawson exposes this phenomenon in her rendering of the episode that follows, conveyed from the perspective of the members of the group.

> "Can I take action against my neighbour?" a man in speckled suiting began, but the processes of democracy were interrupted by a weirdy: "What about these Tests!"[172]
> The young man shouted something [...]. But he was taken away. "Poor chap" [...].

---

169 *A Minor Apocalypse*, p. 118
170 Connolly, C., *The Unquiet Grave* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 60
171 Jung, C. G., *The Undiscovered Self*, trans. by R. Hull (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1958), p. 59
172 *The Cold Country*, p. 25

> "But we *do need* a forum of ideas, however wild they may seem [...]. What do other people think about this terrible responsibility of ours?"
> The man in speckled suiting rose again: "My neighbour won't paint his side of the fence."[173]

In precisely the same tone, Iris Murdoch portrays the same essential tendency. ""I suppose it's nuclear war," said Midge, "the young say it hangs over us all."

"I confess I don't notice it all that much," said Ursula, "but then I'm so busy.""[174]

Dawson's juxtaposition of a grudge about a fence and the prospect of global annihilation encapsulates the essence of estrangement. A stronger sense of kinship and protectiveness is felt for inanimate possessions than for life itself. As the librarian muses to Dickie, ""Without one's own personal property, and all the things that pin us in Time, we might so easily come adrift.""[175] In the same vein, when Dickie looks in horror at Jean's box labelled: ""My muddles and mendables""[176] he instantly thinks of his mother. For she is confined in two metaphorical boxes at once - the marginal world of the "hospital" and the box of her own mind with which she longs to part company to erase the world of the hospital and all it represents. However, she is far from "muddled," her outlook being characterized by consistency and conviction, and, as her fate testifies, neither does she prove to be "mendable."

Just as Miss Dicks is side-lined by the normalizing drive (whose world Zay associates with those in possession of 'money' and 'beliefs'[177]), the young man who speaks out against the Tests is linguistically dismissed as a "weirdy." As Foucault argues, normalizing power consolidates itself because members of the social, in order to guarantee renewal of their membership, internalize the rules of the group and

---

[173] *The Cold Country*, p. 27
[174] Murdoch, I., *The Good Apprentice* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), p. 25
[175] *The Cold Country*, p. 20
[176] *The Cold Country*, p. 21

function as the charges which activate these rules. The secondary characters in *The Cold Country* construct a sense of *ersatz* identity not only through their possessions but also by the ostensible benevolence with which they treat the marginal (an entity created by their own appropriation and monopoly of the discourse of the "normal"). They pity Dickie, literally and metaphorically drive Miss Dicks to a psychiatric hospital and dismiss as a "weirdy" the man who speaks out against the Tests.

As Foucault demonstrates, the punitive stick of monolithic pre-micropolitical power has become so internalized that the meek need no longer be pacified with the carrot of inheriting the earth. Having absorbed the idea that as members of the majority the earth is already theirs, the chance to pillory their less normalized counterparts acts as its own incentive and reward. Since those who resist this mechanization of conduct tend to be the focus for intensified applications of the normalizing drive, two birds can be killed with a single stone. Not only can a communal sense of threat be unleashed (masquerading as benevolent concern), but the marginal or self-marginalized can function as projection sites for the latent negative feelings of the group.

As Laing argues, 'once people can be induced to experience a situation in a particular way, they can be expected to behave in similar ways. Induce people all to want the same things, hate the same things, feel the same threat, then their behaviour is already captive.'[178] In *The Cold Country* the normalizing drive has so normalized destruction (discrediting marginality through the "benevolent" desire for the conversion of the marginal) that "the people" have even come to desire the Bomb. As Foucault asserts, we now live in a world governed by micropolitical powers 'which do

---

[177] *The Cold Country*, p. 135
[178] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 80

not so much repress our [...] desires as create them.'[179] Therefore servitude is so ingrained that the carceral continuum, 'the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power,'[180] has 'diffused penitentiary techniques'[181] even, in internalized form, into the very grain of individuals.

In *The Cold Country*, the normalizing drive functions laterally as well as from top to bottom, as can be seen in the invalidation of any doubts regarding nuclear testing. The fact that no one's interests are here being served reveals the way that power has acquired its own momentum, the habit of complicity having created a self-stoking machine (the phenomenon to which Joyce refers in his use of the term the 'gratefully oppressed'[182]). Gratitude generates the symptoms of oppression so that actual oppressors cease to be required. As Fromm contends, our age is characterized by the move from overt to anonymous authority, where 'methods of mass suggestion' enable force to be 'camouflaged by consent.'[183] He develops his argument by drawing a parallel between microcosmic and macrocosmic forms of normalization, both of which pre-emptively invalidate dissent through the use of "benevolent" rhetoric.

> What can I know of myself as long as I do not know that the self I do know is largely a synthetic product [...], that "defense" means war and "duty" submission; that "virtue" means obedience and "sin" disobedience; [...] that everyone tries to rationalize evil intentions and actions and to make them appear noble and beneficent ones [...]. Unless I am able to analyze the unconscious aspects of the society in which I live, I cannot know who *I* am, because I don't know which part of me is *not* me.[184]

Extending the Foucauldian adage that unless one knows how something is made one cannot begin to unmake it, Fromm confirms that interstitial resistance relies on an

---

[179] May, p. 11
[180] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 304
[181] *Discipline and Punish*, p. 297
[182] Joyce, J., *Dubliners* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 40
[183] *The Art of Being*, p. 25
[184] *The Art of Being*, pp. 77-8

inferential meta-knowledge. This can then be used to demystify the self- and mutually-consolidating discourses that characterize the normalizing drive.

In *The Cold Country*, Zay's inability to deconstruct her sense of collusion is complicated in the case of Miss Dicks who, despite being dimly aware of the situation, eagerly complies with her own destruction. As Dickie comes to realize, however, their self-obliteration paradoxically demonstrates more courage, autonomy and honesty than he was initially aware. The contentiousness of the concept of survival is encapsulated in his realization that 'like Zay he had writhed [...] but unlike Zay the weight of powerlessness had bedded him down.'[185] In accordance with the Szaszian claim that 'doubt is to certainty as neurosis is to psychosis [...]. In short, the neurotic has problems, the psychotic has solutions,'[186] Dickie occupies the rôle of neurotic while Zay takes the step into "psychosis." She identifies and orchestrates death as her solution (although only after psychic death has imperceptibly insinuated itself).

> The constituents looked [...] certain of their survival [...]. But the pattern was one of obedience [...]; women smiled among their things; and thousands of Miss Dickses, their anger turned against themselves, were fed and tipped and wiped. What made them think they had survived?[187]

Kierkegaard's adage that "life" and "understanding" exist in different dimensions (since chronologically we can only "live" forwards and yet can only "understand" backwards) in no way invalidates Dickie's minor victory in having reached the point where he can formulate this question. Throughout the novel the juxtaposition of situations and events, on the individual, community, social and global level, highlights

---

185 *The Cold Country*, p. 143
186 *The Second Sin*, p. 92
187 *The Cold Country*, p. 151

the effects of the promotion of dependency and enslavement to the normalizing drive.

Dickie

> had tried to scream but never been able. He had tried to write but it always came back. He thought of his mother, smiling as they rolled her over and over, or hauled her up and down remote from anger, and himself sealed too, a son of the nuclear age.[188]

It is this "sealing off," a theme explored in greater depth in Dawson's later fiction, that tends to dissolve the very thought of resistance. The memory of his mother being "rolled over and over," which echoes Zay's metaphor of the rows of chickens "trussed and turning," evokes the same instilled passivity reflected in Lessing's urgent question: 'Why does everyone fall on their backs and wave their little paws in the air?'[189] In the light of Dostoevsky's contention that "man" is best defined as 'a creature who can get used to anything,'[190] Lessing observes that 'there is nothing that people won't try to accommodate into "ordinary life"'[191] until 'we learn to like what we get.'[192] Likewise, Barnes cites as the essence of human tragedy 'the interminable discipline of learning to *stand* everything.'[193] This is an apt description of Dickie's experience in *The Cold Country* where he "grins and bears" everything with a self-defeating determination that not only estranges him from himself but blinds him to the reality of Zay. The enterprise of 'coming to terms with existence,'[194] ambivalence about which is a shared characteristic of all Dawson's protagonists, is memorably conveyed in *The Outsider*. 'I've often thought that had I been compelled to live in the

---

188 *The Cold Country*, p. 77
189 *Partisan Review: An Evening with Doris Lessing*, 1998, at http://lessing.redmood.com/partisan.html
190 Dostoevsky, F., *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, trans. by J. Coulson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 9
191 Lessing, D., *Memoirs of a Survivor* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1976), p. 20
192 *Memoirs of a Survivor*, p. 94
193 Barnes, D., *Spillway and Other Stories* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), p. 68
194 *The Ha-Ha*, p. 173

trunk of a dead tree, with nothing to do but gaze up at the patch of sky just overhead, I'd have got used to it by degrees.'[195]

In *The Cold Country*, the incomprehension that greets objections to nuclear testing echoes the reactions Zay provokes by disclosing her aversion to the presence of the "unborn child." Her protest '"I don't belong to the right class to have bastards, and I'm going to get this lump out if it kills me [...]. I don't want to adapt"'[196] is dismissed by Mabel's invocation of three layers of the myth of inevitability that underpins the normalizing drive. '"You'll have to. It's human chemistry. It's nature's way. It's - God's will."'[197] Zay's insistence that it isn't even hers; it's Dickie's and that she is just 'the oven'[198] highlights her estrangement from her body and her life and aligns her response with the isolated voices opposed to the nuclear tests.

She conceives of the "unborn child" as programmed to destroy her, just as the dissenters perceive the Bomb as poised to destroy the world. The social constraints that oppress her seem reinforced by biological constraints with which her collusion seems assured. For the new means of constraint is not only expanding inside her, it derives its existence from something to which at the time she gave her consent. Convinced she will never be more than 'an object, acted upon,' she stands there 'dark and dripping like an Apache Indian peering over the Badlands at his foe.'[199] Anyone opposed to the Bomb is likewise cast in the rôle of Apache Indian, outnumbered and doomed to defeat by the pervasiveness of semantic mystification.

The dynamic between central and oppositional voices is portrayed in the novel as being defined by an underlying complicity. The existence of a demarcated

---

[195] Camus, A., *L'Etranger*, trans. by Stuart Gilbert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 79
[196] *The Cold Country*, p. 136
[197] *The Cold Country*, p. 119
[198] *The Cold Country*, p. 132

conceptual space for dissent reinforces the myth of benevolent practice appropriated by the *status quo*. The avuncular indulgence displayed towards the young man who criticizes the Bomb encapsulates the complexity of this phenomenon. For arguably his protest merely enmeshes him further in the conceptual apparatus of the power of the majority whose veneer of magnanimity is reinforced by the fact that they allow him to be heard. As Chomsky argues, 'state censorship is not necessary, or even very effective, in comparison to the ideological controls exercised by systems that are more complex and decentralized.'[200] Chomsky goes on to argue:

> In a democratic system of propaganda no one is punished (in theory) for objecting to official dogma. In fact dissidence is encouraged. What this system attempts to do is fix the limits of possible thought [...]. A propaganda system is more effective when its doctrines are insinuated rather than asserted, when it sets the bounds for possible thought rather than simply imposing a clear and easily identifiable doctrine that one must parrot or suffer the consequences.[201]

In a micropolitical climate defined by power's "insinuations" rather than by the "assertions" of force, the challenge for Dawson's protagonists is to think beyond the prescribed "bounds of thought." Power is activated conceptually and actually only when recognized and questioned (when a component of the social resists being subsumed by the normalizing drive). Thus power and resistance exist symbiotically, mutually generating and activating each other. This phenomenon is clarified by the Deleuzean contention that 'the final word on power is that *resistance comes first.*'[202] However this is not to say that without resistance power does not exist, for resistance functions as the catalyst of power's transition from a latent to an active entity.

---

[199] *The Cold Country*, p. 137
[200] Chomsky, N., *Language and Responsibility* (New York & London: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 20
[201] *Language and Responsibility*, pp. 38-9
[202] *Foucault*, pp. 89-90

The implicit faith harboured by the characters in *The Cold Country* that those "in the know" are equipped to make decisions on their behalf conveys their estrangement from their lives. As Foucault argues, the micropolitical social network is a system of inter- and intra-subjective policing. "The State" as an entity is therefore almost obsolete since the social subject identifies so strongly with its anonymous apparatus that he becomes synonymous and continuous with it. As Ortega y Gasset argues, 'mass-man sees in the State an anonymous power, and, feeling himself, like it, anonymous, he believes that the State is something of his own.'[203] However, in a micropolitical society "the majority" assumes the function of the State as the conceptual cartographer of the social.

In *The Cold Country* the discourse of the majority is shown to be upheld by mutually reinforcing myths: "it's for your own good," "necessary sacrifices" and "you have to adapt;" and a concomitant set of euphemisms: "protection, guidance and re-education," "the op.," "urban renewal" and "Civil Defence." Zygmunt Bauman cites purported "love motives" as domination's chief 'legitimizing formulae' by means of which "pastoral power" lulls 'its agents into self-righteousness.' [204] Such semantic mystification perpetuates techniques of constraint and normalization and tends to confound attempts to find a locus of resistance.

---

[203] Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1957), p. 120
[204] Bauman, Z., *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 103

The Scream: Revolt Against Collusion

Dickie recalls that all his life they have 'stood round and assured him that he would grow used to it, as though estrangement were at the heart of our lives.'[205] His response to the Bomb, '"Look what it's doing to us, even if it never goes off at all,"'[206] could equally be applied to the presence of the "unborn child." However, although the "unborn child" causes dialogue with Zay to collapse and precipitates her suicide, by revealing Sir Thomas for what he is it enables Dickie to deconstruct his habit of connivance and transform his conception of survival. 'If he had been able to refuse, shout, escape, Zay would have loved him.'[207] Cioran contends that 'there is no negator who is not famished for some catastrophic *yes*.'[208] However until the end of the novel Dickie resists negation and refusal lest by thus exposing his hunger for affirmation he should have to confront the hollowness of the way in which he has survived. It takes Zay's death to activate his awareness that his obsession with survival itself has obscured any focus on its quality or nature. Bettelheim discusses the enforced split between the 'inner self that might be able to retain its integrity, and the rest of the personality that would have to submit and adjust for survival.'[209] He argues that in this sense, as in others, the concentration camp experience is only quantitatively distinct from life in society in its generality. This phenomenon is obliquely explored throughout Dawson's fiction which dramatizes the way in which when 'small inroad after small inroad' is made into one's autonomy it is hard to know at which point 'to say: no more.'[210]

---

205 *The Cold Country*, p. 143
206 *The Cold Country*, pp. 142-3
207 *The Cold Country*, p. 151
208 *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 117
209 *The Informed Heart. Autonomy in a Mass Age*, pp. 126-7
210 *The Informed Heart*, p. 261

Mandelstam asserts that 'if nothing else is left, one must scream. Silence is the real crime against humanity [...]. There is a moment of truth when you are overcome by sheer astonishment: [...] "So this is the world I live in!" We are so stupefied that we even lose the power to scream.'[211] This response to Stalinist atrocities could equally apply to the world inhabited by Dickie, reiterating the conceptual continuity of the effects of force with those of power. Although Dickie succumbs to "stupefaction," Zay's death and the threat of the Bomb generate the impetus for him to find his voice at the end of the novel. Earlier he had misconstrued freedom from his father as definitive freedom but just as Zay, like Joanna in *Fowler's Snare*, is enslaved by the hope of external salvation, Dickie too was still constrained by the need for external validation of his life.

Although Virginia in *The Snake Pit* falls prey to a similar stupefaction: 'How can you speak from the bottom of a [...] hole? I'm too tired to shout. And the quicksand is seeping into my nostrils,'[212] sometimes even the *thought* of a scream can function to activate resistance. Indeed it could be argued that resistance deriving from any other source is implicitly doomed to replicate whatever provoked the initial desire to resist, consolidating rather than subverting the underlying paradigm of power. Resistance serves no purpose if not only is it built into the plan but functions as a *sine qua non* of the plan. As Golding implies in his novel *Free Fall*, a scream represents the drive to reject automation and achieve self-reliance and a reintegration of the fractured aspects of the alienated self. 'The very act of crying out changed the thing

---

211 *Hope Against Hope*, p. 42
212 *The Snake Pit*, p. 172

that cried [...]. When a man cries out instinctively he begins to search for a place where help may be found [...] in every corner of the interior world.'[213]

The impact of a scream derives from its status as a reflex. For although it encapsulates the conflict between the individual and the social, it issues from a source not subject to the transmission wires of power. Thus it functions not as an incipient counter-power but as an autonomous response. As Cioran argues, 'negation never proceeds from reasoning, but from something much more obscure and old. Arguments come afterwards, to justify and sustain it. Every *no* rises out of the blood.'[214] A scream thus represents an instinctive rejection of complicity and an expression of revolt against the systematic inroads that are forged into one's autonomy. While "reasoning" is prey to the underlying equations of the normalizing drive, "the blood" represents an interstitial point through which this drive can be conceptually transcended.

The Cold Country departs from the interiority of *The Ha-Ha* and *Fowler's Snare* in its explicit exploration of the links between interlocking levels and manifestations of constraint. Dickie's growing awareness that passivity has the same results whether it takes the form of submission to lobotomy, compliance with demolition, enslavement to social approval or resignation to the Bomb finally mobilizes him as the novel draws to a close. 'Another banner went up. A young man chanted a slogan. It was a stupid one, but a shout, or a scream, was sometimes all there was.'[215]

---

213 Golding, W., *Free Fall* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1985), p. 184
214 *The Trouble with Being Born*, p. 30
215 *The Cold Country*, p. 153

The Matron at the "Home for the Elderly" who press-gangs "the elderly" into "having fun" and bullies them into participating ""with *all* the actions, please!""[216] dramatizes the "fun morality" implicit in the normalizing drive: ""You've got to have fun (whether you like it or not).""[217] Clearly if the captives can be seen to be "having fun," this reinforces the myth of the benevolence of their captors. Dickie in *The Cold Country* slowly comes to realize that in his quest for approval he has complied with social demands in the same way that "the elderly" allow themselves be coaxed into propping up the myth of the benevolence of their tormentors. 'They had piped and he had danced, with all the actions, too.'[218] This flash of insight echoes Joanna's in *Fowler's Snare* that her life mirrors precisely the futile leaps through hoops of the circus dogs. However Dickie's fictional predecessors, Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* and Joanna in *Fowler's Snare*, only envision resistance as something interior. Dickie in *The Cold Country* complements his inner resistance, symbolized by a scream, with attempts to integrate it into a broader social resistance to the destruction of communities ("urban renewal") and destruction of the world ("Civil Defence"). He remains ambivalent about such 'Brotherhood. A strong hand, stronger than they, taking hold of them [...]. It might have been 1940 all of a sudden, they loved each other so.'[219] Yet his grasp of the overlap between different strands of oppression, as well as of the complicity of the oppressed, casts him as a more multi-dimensional character than Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* or Joanna in *Fowler's Snare*. When constraint is activated through micropolitical channels, resistance must formulate itself

---

216 *The Cold Country*, p. 38
217 Wolfenstein & Leites, *Movies* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1950), p. 21
218 *The Cold Country*, p. 109
219 *The Cold Country*, pp. 154-5

micropolitically too and proceed from interstitial spaces on the microcosm-macrocosm continuum.

While *The Ha-Ha* ends on an ultimately optimistic note and *Fowler's Snare* on an undeniably pessimistic one, the ending of *The Cold Country* falls somewhere in between because Dickie is subject to a wider range of pressures, all of which have an impact on the development of different aspects of his identity. Had Josephine and Joanna had to contend with guilt over the sacrifice of traumatized girlfriends and institutionalized mothers, not to mention "dysfunctional" childhoods and the question of the Bomb, they might have been less preoccupied with the conflicts assailing their inner lives, or at least to have viewed these conflicts differently. However, like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*, Dickie resists and questions the fate laid down for him and reaches an understanding of the forces ranged against him. In other words, he begins to understand how his oppression has been constructed, the Foucauldian prerequisite for beginning to "unmake it," an understanding vital for psychic survival.

As Bettelheim argues, 'to survive as a man not a walking corpse' one has 'first and foremost to remain informed and aware,' particularly of how one 'feels about complying.'[220] Dickie's physical survival was ensured by a combination of the arbitrary and his mother's first unwitting step towards self-sacrifice. However, it is the death of Zay that by shattering his complacency provides the impetus for his first faltering move towards survival as someone engaged and perplexed, rather than as a compliant "walking corpse." He has felt intimations of 'the thought of the outside,' which is equated by Deleuze with the 'thought of resistance.'[221]

---

[220] *The Informed Heart*, pp. 156-7
[221] Deleuze, pp. 89-90

Strawberry Boy

Marginalization And The Group's Threat To The Interstitial

Strawberry Boy develops Dawson's concerns by engaging with the explicit imposition of marginality. Saul, who is black, has his identity eroded not only by the Olsons, who represent the hypocrisies of "liberal" paternalism, but also by Bee, embodiment of the commune's purported ideals, who represents the pitfalls of the "alternative way of life" and whose inverted platitudes consolidate Saul's invalidation The normalizing discourse insinuates itself by inciting Saul to internalize the "false selves" bestowed on him to cement the *status quo*. The systematic process of his self-alienation and the displacement of the potential for his "true self" to be realized is reflected macrocosmically in the Borough Planners' redefinition of what should constitute the community space. Saul's identity, like the identity of the community, is sacrificed to a normalizing vision. However, through the character of Wersby, another victim of the Olsons' bounty, Dawson explores the liberatory potential of "art." Music represents an interstitial space where the normalizing drive can be transcended. Wersby's perspective evolves through his gradual engagement with integrating himself into the social, an evolution symbolized by his demystification and ultimate rejection of the inherited fantasies activated by Saul. The symbolic alliance of these two characters suggests that the desire for authentic union contains the potential for it to be attained and challenges the mutual exclusivity of social engagement and "art." Wersby's composition, built on a superstructure of "hope and forgiveness and surprise," transcends the myths of inevitability that underlie the normalizing drive.

The Olsons: Marginalization Through "Tokenism" And Paternalism

The Cold Country having represented a departure from the interiority of the single protagonist, Dawson's fourth novel *Strawberry Boy* (1976) continues this development by exploring reactions to the changing times of a disparate group of characters whose lives converge and overlap. The conflicts these characters dramatize amplify the resonances between microcosm and macrocosm. For rather than being presented as dramas unfolding solely within the subject's inner life, they are contextualized and intensified by the pressures that spring from their negotiation, as each character tries to forge a place for himself in the world. The Foucauldian argument that "unless one knows how something is made, one cannot begin to unmake it" is the defining factor in the experience of the characters in *The Cold Country*, which examines the contentiousness of the concept of survival. A development of this Foucauldian position informs the world of *Strawberry Boy* where the more (and the more painfully) the characters question themselves, the greater the likelihood of "breakdown," portrayed as a prerequisite, though never as a guarantee, of "breakthrough." Those who evade confronting their complicity by constructing barricades of certainty around themselves survive in the technical sense by their implicit denial of the existence of anything to be questioned. Yet such survival is survival in name alone, as illustrated by the Laingian argument that 'the relevance of Freud to our time is largely his insight, and, to a very considerable degree, his *demonstration* that the *ordinary* person is a shrivelled, desiccated fragment of what a person can be.'[1] However, through her exploration of what lies in store for those who resist such spurious formulations of survival, Dawson exposes by implication the

---

[1] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 22

contextual intelligibility of this option. While breakdown, which represents an *acknowledgement* of impasse, is no guarantee of breakthrough, the avoidance of self-scrutiny produces, paradoxically, an even greater impasse, in that through being denied it increasingly pervades and defines existence.

Saul's race (he is black) functions as a means for Dawson to extend her portrayal of the impact on the marginalized of the normalizing drive. Whereas in *The Ha-Ha* it was Josephine's metaphysical perspective that attracted the normalizing fervour of "the group," Saul, more conventional in his aspirations and outlook, is induced to see himself as peripheral by constructed reactions to his race. These disturbed and disturbing responses and the cascade of "cover-stories" they obliquely unleash, concocted in order to eclipse and deny them, systematically overwhelm him to such an extent that he is presented as a character subsumed to the point of non-existence. However, although Dawson implicitly criticizes the way in which others recruit him either to focus or deny their unease, his function in the novel is a structural replication of the purpose he serves for the characters in whom he provokes a response. The overt and covert hostility he encounters is inverted and thereby reinforced by the ontologically annihilating platitudes of "compassion" recited by the self-appointed ambassadors of "liberality." This phenomenon is exemplified by the attitudes of the Olsons, a "well-meaning" couple who "befriend" him. The effects of these ostensibly converse attitudes, both of which ignore the reality of the stimulus to which they masquerade as a response, are conceptually indistinguishable since both deny Saul authentic identity as a subject, and consequently undermine his sense of himself as one.

Strawberry Boy represents a departure for Dawson not only in its focus on *imposed* marginality but also by rendering contextually intelligible the behaviour of the tormentors as well as the tormented. The psychology of these agents of the normalizing drive is incisively analysed and revealed to be characterized by fluctuating degrees of insight *within* particular characters as well as by variations between them.

The looming threat of "urban renewal," one of the sites of *The Cold Country*'s resonance, moves centre-stage in *Strawberry Boy* where it ceases to be simply a novelistic presence, macrocosmically illustrative of the urge to impose order and the compulsion to "have everything in its place." Instead it becomes a force that by bulldozing the setting brutalizes the setting's inhabitants. Furthermore, the squatters' commune, ostensibly a forum for ideological protest, is gradually exposed as a microcosmic replication of the very abuses of power it was purportedly established to subvert. If, as Chomsky contends, the over-used term "ironic" refers to 'predictable consequences [...] that blatantly contradict professed ideals,'[2] the atmosphere in the commune encapsulates irony. It rapidly degenerates into a hotbed of factionalism and underhand attempts to impose a hierarchy, an "irony" which could have been foreseen from the outset in the light of the disparity between its inhabitants' self-seeking motives and its "professed ideals" of comradeship and solidarity. The behaviour of the inhabitants of the commune is contextualized by Arendt's contention in *The Human Condition* that it is all too common for people to purport to believe earnestly in doctrines that their everyday behaviour unerringly contradicts.[3] In fact, their lack of insight calls into question the conceptual validity of irony, whose medium, the

---

[2] *Deterring Democracy*, p. 430

[3] Arendt, H., *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998)

awareness of a disparity between ideology and reality, seems negligible to the point of non-existence. The answer to Laing's question of whether we can ever 'do more than reflect the decay around and within us'[4] perhaps depends on whether or not we acknowledge our position as the progenitors as well as the beneficiaries of decay. Both the Olsons and the commune dwellers fail to make this acknowledgement.

The commune in *Strawberry Boy*, a self-defined alternative to power's dehumanizing effects, is doomed to become an incipient counter-power because its inhabitants ignore their internalization of everything they claim they want to subvert. The underlying rationale therefore perpetuates itself. This is the context in which the world of the novel is informed by a Foucauldian ascending analysis of power and its ubiquitous effects. Individuals are not only power's 'inert or consenting target' but are 'always also the elements of its articulation,' its vehicles 'not its point of application.'[5] Therefore an effective analysis must proceed from 'its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own [...] trajectory, their own techniques and tactics' which are 'invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and [...] forms of global domination.'[6]

The professed ideals of the commune evaporate even as ideals because the inhabitants only rail against external injustice and ignore the ways that they themselves, having been colonized by these injustices, consolidate and rearticulate them. The defining characteristic of Dawson's protagonists is their feeling of estrangement from "the group." However, although the rejection of ready-made

---

[4] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 11
[5] *Power/Knowledge*, p. 98
[6] *Power/Knowledge*, p. 99

answers and inherited explanations encourages self-scrutiny, it is only her later protagonists who subsequently draw on the results of this exploration to try to reintegrate themselves into the world. While analysis of one's collusion with the normalizing drive is no guarantee of breakthrough, its absence guarantees impasse, as expressed by the Szaszian contention that while it is not necessarily true that 'where there's a will there's a way,' it is unarguable that 'where there is no will, there is no way.'[7]

The solipsistic paradox is dramatized in *Strawberry Boy* by Wersby the solitary composer who, despite his armour of constructed misanthropy, gradually comes to challenge his received assumptions, specifically about "race," but more generally pertaining to humanity as a whole and the place he wants to occupy within it. As Laing argues,

> either our inter-human behaviour is unintelligible, in that we are simply the passive vehicles of inhuman processes, whose ends are as obscure as they are at present outside our control, or our own behaviour towards each other is a function of our own experience and our intentions, however alienated we are from them. In the latter case, we must take final responsibility for what we make of what we are made of.[8]

Despite their differences, Saul who from the outset tries to participate and Wersby who takes refuge in his music are finally paradoxically aligned in their gradual acknowledgement of their collusion with the elusive instruments of their oppression. They both construct a will to courage that finally comes to serve as courage itself. In the same way, despite a veneer of divergent intent, the inhabitants of the commune replicate the function of the representatives of conventional "liberality." Neither group questions their internalization of the rhetoric of the social structures of which they are

---

[7] *The Untamed Tongue*, p. 43

the product but which they also perpetually reproduce. Unlike Saul and Wersby, both evade responsibility for "what they make of what they are made of." Although Wersby barely says a word in the novel, his ongoing struggle to define his place in the world and to balance solitary composition with social responsibility is rendered by Dawson in a stream of italicized inner monologues and fantasized inner dialogues. These convey cumulative conflict scenarios which while they lead him to the brink of breakdown suggest intimations of breakthrough. Thus they are structurally and stylistically antithetical to the defining evasiveness of the "liberal" Olsons, encapsulated in their first exchange:

'"Coloured people really do seem to have it hard in London."

"They prefer to be called blacks."'[9]

The reality behind Molly's absent-minded comment (along with the comment itself) is hastily dismissed by Peter who, more stricken than she by the ineffectual pangs of conscience, shies away from contemplating the matter. At the close of the novel, Molly's lack of development is conveyed by a replication of the attitude, or the absence of one, that prompted her earlier remark: '"The police aren't all that nice to coloured people."'[10] The use of litotes, that speaks volumes about the attitudes that permeate and define her milieu, is reinforced by the intervention of the authorial voice: 'Molly meant well but her spurts of moral indignation usually led to jumble sales, and her outrage to cocktail parties.'[11] Her veneer of social concern, confined to the realm of cliché, is illuminated by Hesse's description of the 'average citizen,' who has 'set a watchman between himself and his soul [...], a security police, and he

---

[8] *The Politics of Experience*, pp. 24-5
[9] Dawson, J., *Strawberry Boy* (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1976), p. 2
[10] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 157

recognizes nothing that comes directly from that abyss of the soul before it has been given that watchman's stamp of approval.'[12]

The compulsive chatter of Molly's dinner parties functions to deny the existence of such a watchman.

> "We like to mix with the local people [...]. And we seem to be on good terms with the immigrant community as well [...]. When Saul stays with us [...], we don't even bother to change the sheets afterwards [...]."
>
> "No, nor do we when ours comes. She came to Brighton with us last summer, and everyone in the hotel was so courteous and we felt so proud."
>
> "I know. We took Saul to Wells Cathedral [...]."
>
> "I know. When we took Zinka to the House of Commons ...."
>
> At this point they reached stalemate and truce.[13]

This exchange is illuminated by Cioran's indictment of society as an 'inferno of saviors [...]. It is enough for me to hear someone [...] say "we" with a certain inflection of assurance, to hear him invoke "others" and regard himself as their interpreter - for me to consider him an enemy. I see in him a tyrant *manqué*.'[14] Eco casts further light on Molly's world when he argues that through such parodic political talk 'the strength the citizen has at his disposal for political debate is vitiated and disciplined.' Chatter is thus 'the ersatz of political speech,' creating the illusion that 'this energy is expended to conclude something' and hence producing its rôle as 'fake conscience.'[15] This function is continually reinforced in Dawson's novel as Molly and her acolytes not only strive to outdo each another with their spurious displays of open-mindedness but are also engaged in constant competition regarding their outrage at the lack of it in others.

---

[11] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 2
[12] *My Belief*, p. 31
[13] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 13-14

"'She asked should she include immigrants in her survey, so I [...] shouted "Shame on you for that remark."'"[16]

The dubiousness of their purported liberality is confirmed on the one hand by the deludedness of their professed sense of identification, designed to imply equality and universalism, and on the other by their ingratiating expressions of awe and wonder, designed to invert the unquestioned hierarchy as a gesture of pre-emptive pacification. "'I'm an immigrant myself [...], from South Africa, so I have a rough idea of what it's like"'[17] coexists with "'Ah, but you've got your jazz [...], your laughter. Your feeling for life."'[18] Saul is 'tired of telling people that he came from Bognor'[19] and that jazz and laughter are equally absent from his life. He visualizes 'his mother's face at the end of a week in the shoulder-pad factory where she worked and where the other oversewers discussed last night's TV programmes across her machine and her face'[20] and recalls his father's 'meticulous grating as he read from *Bible Windows*.'[21] The only change a generation has wrought is that instead of being "talked across," Saul is bombarded by a volley of assumptions and inverted assumptions which although directed at his physical presence continue to bypass him as a subject. Amidst this miasma of platitudes and inverted platitudes, he feels himself losing sight of his own experience.

Since the main threat these attitudes pose resides in their potential to infiltrate and manipulate the way that Saul perceives himself, he almost prefers 'the thought of

---

[14] Cioran, E.M., *A Short History of Decay*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), p. 5

[15] Eco, U., *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986), p. 163

[16] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 14

[17] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 15

[18] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 16-17

[19] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 15

[20] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 16

a street gang,'[22] which would at least be free from the "double-think" by which the world of the Olsons is defined. Dawson juxtaposes their pandering to him with the prejudice and hostility that they go to such lengths to deny. These surreal if predictable juxtapositions are all the more sinister in that everything is delivered in the same "chattering" tone.

'"We don't want a Harlem [...] bang in the centre of London. A violent black ghetto. Much better to slum clear them. Spread them out. Distribute them."'[23]

Similarly, despite the Olsons' much-vaunted bounty in having taken Saul to Wells Cathedral, since he never exists to them as anything but a prop they never think to conceive of him as having a place in their world. Towards the end of the novel, when their behaviour has succeeded in wearing him down, Peter announces regretfully that '"Saul wants the money for his passage back to Jamaica,"'[24] his use of the word "back" betraying the reality that underlies his posture of concern.

Laing argues that 'the one person does not use the other merely as a hook to hang projections on. He strives to find in the other, or to induce the other to become, the very *embodiment* of projection. The other person's collusion is required to "complement" the identity self feels impelled to sustain.'[25] Throughout the novel, notwithstanding an isolated outburst of aggression on a bus, Saul's behaviour is strikingly antithetical to that imagined to prevail in the "violent black ghetto" that those in the Olsons' entourage invoke. However, as he comes to realize, he has instead been subtly induced to embody the Olsons' *inverse* projection, and that his

---

[21] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 17
[22] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 17
[23] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 27
[24] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 156
[25] *Self and Others*, p. 111

ongoing efforts to secure their approval have consolidated his sense of self-estrangement. 'He tried to feel anger [...]. But all he felt was complicity. "One is enough" - it was himself saying it.'[26] 'A voice in him added "Please go away or you'll spoil things for me." [...] He began to despise himself [...]. He had cut himself off as though this gesture were bold and provocative - a gesture of defiance - a political act - rather than a way of keeping himself safe.'[27]

In *The Cold Country*, it takes Dickie a long time to engage with his connivance with the consensus view of all that he is seen to represent. In *Strawberry Boy*, Dawson reanimates Dickie's father's world in the self-satisfaction of the Olsons. Once again, their 'power deifies itself' and thus 'automatically produces its own theology.' By behaving like God, omniscient and unquestionable, 'it awakens religious feelings towards itself'[28] so that Saul, like Dickie, becomes enmeshed in its theology. While street gangs represent the use of force, which excludes negotiation and hence the possibility of collusion, the impact of power derives from its tendency to induce collaboration, by means of which it perpetually consolidates itself.

The Foucauldian emphasis on the implicitly "operational" nature of power stresses that wherever it 'exists, it is being exercised' and that, while it can be hard to identify who holds it, it is always obvious who lacks it.[29] A common ruse for the denial of this lack is its tendency to induce identification with its definers, as Dickie does with his father in *The Cold Country*. This is the sense in which power 'needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body,

---

[26] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 137
[27] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 138
[28] *The Art of the Novel*, p. 102
[29] *Language, counter-memory, practice*, p. 41

much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.'[30] In *Strawberry Boy* the structures represented by the Olsons delineate Saul's experience not through identifiable constraint but by inciting him to accept their definitions. While it is true that their orchestrations erode his sense of identity, what is more important is his ostensibly voluntary identification with the alternative reality they construct. This phenomenon is illuminated by Foucault's contention that 'power produces reality,'[31] since micropolitical subjects internalize conceptually the panoptical central tower and codify reality to conform with the notion of consensus.

In *Strawberry Boy* Saul recognizes that he has started to see himself 'through Olson eyes [...]. He had a weak ego, he supposed, and couldn't help taking over other people's valuations of himself and adopting them as his own.'[32] As this analysis reveals, his systematic self-estrangement is compounded by his awareness of the tactics being employed. When Ruth, his white girlfriend, asks why the Olsons exclude her from their gatherings, his response betrays this awareness and therefore by extension his connivance: '"You don't happen to be black, that's why."'[33] His breakdown manifests itself in a parodying of the parody: '"You silly black bugger [...]. Get back up that monkey palm."[34] His exaggerated form of mimicry echoes Miss Dicks's self-starvation in *The Cold Country* and her avidity for the lobotomy that kills her. In both cases, the exaggeration is only of the *professed* definitions of the definers; their *denied* definitions, masked by the myth of benevolence but inferable from their behaviour, are captured and reproduced with uncanny accuracy. While Miss Dicks is viewed as an inconvenience, metaphorically occupying too much space, Saul is cast as

---

30 "Truth and Power" in Rabinow, P. (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 61
31 "The Means of Correct Training" in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 205
32 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 7
33 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 9

a primitive simpleton, in need of guidance through the alien "civilized" culture of a Britain that benignly concedes to tolerate his presence as a guest. The behaviour of the defined at the point of breakdown is thus portrayed as a taking to extremes of their assimilation of social attitudes. This phenomenon, dramatized by Miss Dicks and by Saul, not only fulfils but produces a surplus with regard to the prophecy the definers generate. Having accomplished its purpose, the power articulated by these definitions is interpreted and experienced by those on whom it is exercised in its more overt and primitive manifestation as force, with force absorbing the surplus. Miss Dicks ends up in "psychiatric care" and at the close of *Strawberry Boy* Saul is on parole (after having vented on the driver of the bus the self-loathing he has absorbed throughout the novel). Although, like George Jackson, his self-loathing turns to hatred when he discovers 'that the mystification' has been 'injected intentionally,'[35] unlike Jackson he misdirects his rage.

This is the point at which the myth of benevolence is invoked by the *status quo* to obscure the true dynamic. For in Foucauldian terms 'it is not crime that alienates the individual from society, but that crime is itself due rather to the fact that one is in society as an alien.'[36] Furthermore, the punitive-reformative system epistemologically fabricates criminals by the 'construction of the criminal behind the crime.' [37] This is an example of the way in which 'the mechanisms of power not only give rise to a possible problematization of a particular object, but bring that object into

---

[34] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 162
[35] Jackson, G., *Soledad Brother. The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 202
[36] *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 275-6
[37] Cousins & Hussain, p. 195

being.'[38] This point is emphasized by the novelist Thomas Bernhard who deplores society's shamelessness 'vis-à-vis its criminals' whom it catapults 'into their so-called crimes which are [...] nothing but [...] traps set up for them by this inhuman society.'[39] Yet, as Dawson's fiction demonstrates, to deny the existence of scapegoating the rhetoric of benevolence intervenes. Her writing is illuminated by the Szaszian contention that the greater the 'disparity between the prescribed rules of conduct and actual social behaviour, the greater the need for scapegoat-sacrifices as a means of maintaining the social myth that man lives according to his officially declared ethical beliefs.'[40] This is the context in which the proposed lobotomy will "help" Miss Dicks and in which Peter "thoughtfully" advises Saul to visit a Laingian psycho-therapist who is '"interested in the way people need these "false selves""'[41] (rather, or so he assumes, than in the way that people like Peter both activate them and need them to need them). In other words, the mystifying rhetoric of power is invoked to justify and facilitate operations of force. Even such "schools of thought" as "anti-psychiatry," energized by the urge to expose and question totalizing theories, are invoked as agents of that which they seek to subvert.

Saul's predicament in *Strawberry Boy* is informed by the punitive-normative-therapeutic continuum of scapegoating strategies and normalization techniques that Foucault examines in *Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilization.* Punishment, embodying the use of force, resonates with the "therapeutic" discourse symptomatic of power, a conceptual analogy encapsulated by Kirsner as follows.

---

[38] Visker, R, *Michel Foucault. Genealogy as Critique*, trans. by Chris Turner (London & New York: Verso, 1995), p. 69

[39] Bernhard, T., *Correction*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 136

[40] *The Myth of Mental Illness*, p. 209

[41] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 163

> The psychiatrists (mind-police) diagnose an illness (crime) whereupon the patient (criminal) is hospitalized (imprisoned) and investigations follow. The patient (criminal) is convicted and sentence is passed (therapy). Those with a poor prognosis are dealt with as such, but most at the end of treatment (release) are adjusted (or obey the law) in future.[42]

In Foucauldian terms, the normalizing drive is ontologically characterized by the impetus to convert and subsume whatever might resist it. In *Strawberry Boy* Peter's recommendation of a therapist to locate the source of Saul's self-estrangement is especially ironic given that it is he (and what he represents) who has created what he blithely refers to as Saul's "need" for a "false self." Mark Twain held that 'to the man who wants to use a hammer badly, a lot of things look like nails that need hammering.'[43] In this context Peter's motive for metaphorically hammering Saul, or trying to incite him to submit "voluntarily" to a professional hammerer's services, seems to be the fear not only of superfluity but also of engaging with aspects of his own existence which require a nail. Peter's proposal is informed by Cooper's contention that psychoanalysis has become 'yet another agency in the employ of the endlessly devious, repressive and repressively "tolerant" bourgeois system,'[44] a system whose climate is uncannily captured by the Olsons' milieu in the novel. Freud issued the caveat that through psychoanalysis 'the patient should be educated to liberate and fulfil his own nature, not to resemble others.'[45] However, as Szasz maintains, the tyranny of the normalizing drive has transformed psychotherapy, ideally 'an instrument for liberating man,' into 'yet another technique for pacifying him,'[46] since 'attempts to "treat" a patient are really efforts to convert his conduct

---

[42] Kirsner, pp. 140-141
[43] quoted in *Insanity. The Idea and its Consequences*, p. 53
[44] *The Grammar of Living*, p. 74
[45] Freud, S., "Lines of Advance in Psycho-Analytic Therapy" (1919) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XVII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 165
[46] *Ideology and Insanity*, p. 165

from one mode to another.'[47] This is the context in which Laing argues that any technique concerned with 'an object-to-be-changed rather than a person-to-be-accepted simply perpetuates the disease it purports to cure.'[48] In *Strawberry Boy* the fact that the proposed psycho-therapist is "Laingian" is impossible to ignore. On the one hand this detail could be seen to testify to Dawson's incipient scepticism regarding the validity of the Laingian approach. However, on the other it could also be seen as an implicit comment on its hijacking by those with only a tenuous grasp of what it entails and who overlook its emphasis on contextual intelligibility.

As in *The Cold Country*, power, as embodied by the world of the Olsons, ensnares Saul primarily by the fact that its operations are implicitly denied. Its veneer of benevolence transfers the focus of his paranoia from the Olsons' actual tactics to what Laing refers to as an internalized mistrust of his own mistrust.[49]

> "It must be terribly exciting, Saul, living in such an authentic neighbourhood [...]. I suppose it's not worth the landlord's time and money to do any repairs to the place if it's all coming down."
>
> "Is it coming down?"
>
> "Isn't it? I don't know. I just don't know. Still it's got a terrific amount of character and local colour, hasn't it?"[50]

Szasz contends that 'the main advantage of hinting over more direct modes of communication is the protection it affords the speaker by enabling him to communicate without committing himself to what he says.'[51] The Olsons' chatter generates a maze of removes which establishes a conceptual distance between the speaker and the spoken. Molly's exchange with Saul exemplifies the Laingian double-

---

47 Szasz, T., *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. vi
48 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 45
49 *Sanity, Madness and the Family*, p. 40
50 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 5
51 *The Myth of Mental Illness*, p. 155

bind, with the suggestion being introduced and denied in the same breath.

Encapsulating the disparity between Molly's behaviour and her professed ideals, her very words are riven with contradictions. She implicitly challenges Saul's distinction between on the one hand 'the nigger-hunters, and on the other the people who want to atone.'[52] This is not only because in her complacency she never suspects the existence of anything for which she *ought to* atone, but because she side-steps involvement by inciting him to begin to "hunt" himself.

Dawson conveys Saul's awareness of the attitudes he activates through his metaphorical reduction of himself to something entertaining that provokes polite applause.

'He dreamed he had to lug round a huge musical instrument he couldn't play.

"Play something!"

"I can't play it."'[53]

He feels he has become this ungainly and alien instrument as this is what he has been steadily reduced to, with Molly acting as the conductor and her dinner party guests as the expectant audience. 'Why had he felt so indignant with white people for making him feel like a thing? It was he himself who had sold his subjectivity.'[54] This insight into the collusive dynamic distinguishes Saul from the dwellers of the commune to which he flees in a last-ditch attempt to loosen the shackles he has been induced to internalize in exchange for the dubious privilege of a walk-on part on the stage of the Olsons' world. The fate of the commune, set up in protest against the growing fervour for "urban renewal," is illuminated by Foucauldian theory, for it already moves

---

[52] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 59
[53] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 132

'within the horizon of the power against which it struggles.'[55] Foucault maintained that an unreflective counter-power tends to replicate ontologically what it initially sought to challenge, consolidating the paradigm of power. This phenomenon is also explored in Doris Lessing's *The Good Terrorist* [56] which engages with the ironies of "militant living" where "politics" becomes a convenient diversion from the vacuity of individual lives.

[54] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 139
[55] McNay, p. 87
[56] Lessing, D., *The Good Terrorist* (London: Harper Collins, 1990)

Bee in *Strawberry Boy* exemplifies this tendency, recruiting Saul as a token of her revolutionary zeal just as the Olsons did to validate their liberal credentials. She clearly feels proud that her tolerance of differential inclusion marks her out as more forward-thinking than the kinds of people she and her cohort encounter on their proselytizing missions. 'Once when they had been leafleting in Streatham and were sitting in a pub, a West Indian came in with some friends and was refused service. "How revolting!" Bee exclaimed. "And he wasn't even all that black either."'[57]

Not only does her misplaced indignation echo the purported outrage of the Olsons' acolyte at the proposed exclusion of immigrants from the survey, but Bee also replicates the contradictory juxtaposition of mutually exclusive "awe" and identification that characterizes the attitudes of the Olsons.

'"We British [...] need a long hefty transfusion of your good red blood and guts"'[58] coexists (on being told that somebody's in prison) with the flippant and belittling retort '"Aren't we *all*, in this age of capitalist oppression."'[59] The implicit assumption that despite hailing from Bognor Saul is excluded from being "British" likewise echoes Peter's casual reference to the hypothetical ticket *back* to Jamaica. The attitude behind the daubed slogan "Keep Britain White"[60] is anathema to the likes of Bee and the Olsons for whom, since Britain is "white" by definition, nothing needs to be done to "keep" it so.

---

[57] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 81
[58] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 102
[59] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 99
[60] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 54

"Urban renewal," as a gesture of protest against which the commune was established, has resonance in the novel due to its invocation of a welter of mystifying terms. The purpose of such words as "clearance," "depopulation" and "overdensity" is to obscure the reality that, as one of the soon-to-be-decanted tenants puts it, ""They want the land for higher things than people."'[61] This Orwellian Newspeak of the Borough Planning Committee intensifies the double-think system explored in *The Cold Country*, where Nuclear Deterrence meant the potential for nuclear attack, and lobotomy was linguistically domesticated and sanitized as "the op." In *Strawberry Boy*, the Borough Chairman's semantic contortions (""a brand new environment [...], a flourishing community [...], revitalize [...], constructive dialogue"'[62]) exist on the same continuum as Molly's twitterings about "authentic neighbourhoods" and Bee's of "capitalist oppression." The purpose of such slogans is highlighted by Arendt's contention that

> what convinces masses are not facts and not even inverted facts but only the consistency of the system of which they are a part. Repetition, over-rated in importance because of the common belief in the masses' inferior capacity to grasp and remember, is important only because it instils in them the conviction of consistency in time.[63]

Such "reassurance" is ontologically continuous with the need for reassurance that constructs and sustains the idea of the group, experienced as an internalized consensus. The normalized group is validated not only by its components' spatial "consistency" but also by the incantatory slogans that establish the idea of *temporal* consistency, implying that "the way things are" is the only way they could ever have been, or that they could possibly be. This is the context in which Adorno and

---

61 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 56
62 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 62
63 Arendt, H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 351

Horkheimer's contention that 'innumerable people use words and expressions which they have either ceased to understand or employ only because they trigger off conditioned reflexes' [64] applies to the conceptual construction of the group.

The Foucauldian argument that, unless power's underlying rationale is challenged, anything oppositional will replicate the paradigm informs the fate of the commune in *Strawberry Boy*. For although gestures of liberation can function as a valid point of departure, they cannot alone 'establish [...] practices of liberty.'[65] The establishment of the commune, as an expression of revolt, is misconstrued by its inhabitants as the culmination rather than the starting point of resistance. As Veyne, the historian and Foucauldian critic, maintains, 'each current solution soon reveals that it too involves dangers; every solution is soon imperfect, and this will always be so.'[66] Foucault's caution about unreservedly celebrating acts of resistance contextualizes a newcomer's unguarded outburst in *Strawberry Boy* which encapsulates the glaring absence of "practices of liberty," particularly liberty of thought: '"It's full of them. It's even worse than Brixton."'[67] Foucault's response to the cynical question whether, given all these dangers, there can ever be any ultimate point in power changing hands ('"Oh yes, provided that isn't the final purpose of the operation"'[68]) reveals his awareness of the tendency of means to be misconstrued as ends.

In *Strawberry Boy* Bee's attitudes encapsulate the impasse blocking the subversive potential of the commune which for her merely represents a platform and a

---

64 Adorno & Horkheimer, p. 166

65 Ramazanoglu, pp. 59-60

66 Veyne, P., "The Final Foucault and His Ethics," in A. I. Davidson (ed.), *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, trans. by C. Gordon & A. I. Davidson (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 231

67 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 100

68 *Power/Knowledge*, p. 164

prop. Instead of trying to understand or enact its professed ideological motivations, she merely commandeers it to give her an identity as someone at the centre of the action. Earlier in the novel she confesses, '"All my life I've had a nasty feeling of not really belonging, and not really justifying my existence either. But with a child - " She listed the primary and subsidiary uses for a child.'[69] As inferred from her subsequent immersion in her idea of living in a commune (which overlooks the reality by ignoring even the existence let alone the demands and beliefs of the other people living there), the child proved ineffectual as a trophy of "belonging." Despite its relative lack of contextual intelligibility, her preconceived view of this child mirrors that of Dickie in *The Cold Country* who also conceptualized "his unborn child" not as a potential autonomous life but as a validation of his own. This tendency represents the apex of the recruitment and dragooning of others, for normalization becomes superfluous if subjects are defined from the moment of conception. Bee chooses the commune as her stage (as Molly chooses her dinner parties) and resents it when Saul ignores his cues. It never crosses her mind that Saul, the child or the commune is an entity unto itself; instead existing entities are hijacked for her own ends as if they have only been conjured up by her flourishes of stage management.

Foucault's caution about power changing hands as an end in itself fails to engage explicitly with the rôle played by people like Bee. That "liberators" are all too often mobilized by megalomaniac visions of their own is undisputed. Furthermore the tendency of counter-powers to mutate into new totalities on ousting their predecessors is excavated and analysed. Moreover evidence is far from thin on the ground that a concern for the grand design functions marvellously as an 'alibi for everyday

---

[69] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 80

servitude.'[70] Yet Bee, whose pseudo-self is avidly embraced but in whom a pre-existing "actual" self seems absent (which begs the question of how the pseudo-self came into being), represents a critically neglected area. She illustrates none of the usual pitfalls of projects like the commune or anything with liberatory hopes or affectations. Instead the whole charade is simply enacted out of boredom. Her malice surfaces not in defence of an ideological standpoint but only when the other inhabitants dare to confound the delivery of her lines. Challenging Illich's contention that 'in a consumer society there are inevitably two kinds of slaves: the prisoners of addiction and the prisoners of envy,'[71] Bee is another kind of slave altogether. For she is addicted only to concocting a series of identities for herself and seeks only to consume other people's resistance to submitting to their allocated rôles. While the Olsons represent the micropolitical 'axes of normalization and subtle constraint' that articulate the democratized power of internalized consensus, Bee reinforces these strategies with elements of power's original 'axis of sovereignty.'[72]

The irrevocable transformation of the commune's professed ideals into a new totality is illuminated by the Szaszian caveat that 'in addition to exchanging new rules for old, it is necessary to be aware of the rationale of the old rules and to guard against their persistent effects. One such effect is to form new rules that are, at least partly, covert reaction-formations against the old rules.'[73] Beneath the camouflage of the rhetoric of "freedom" in the commune, its new tyrannies manifest the internalized "persistent effects" of the power of the normalizing discourse. Bee's delight in her assumed outsider status is demystified by the writer Aldo Busi's contention that

---

[70] Blanchot, M., *Michel Foucault, tel que je l'imagine* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1986), p. 44
[71] Illich, I., *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Marion Boyars, 1990), pp. 46-7
[72] May, p. 111
[73] *The Myth of Mental Illness*, p. 203

'society is not always prepared to exile the first one to come along: most people [...] it integrates, offering them semblances of exile.'[74] However, in Bee's case the distinction is superfluous since for her all is semblance anyway. Her unchallenged semantic assumptions so insinuate themselves that the confession of a school teacher barely causes comment.

> "I keep wanting to call our West Indian comrade "Saul Penfold." [...] Saul Penfold I realized at last was a pupil of mine. A plucky cheerful invalid who sits in a bath-chair at the side of the class. A courageous young spastic who makes the best he can [...] of his disabilities."[75]

The divergence of signifiers from what they signify is highlighted by the surreal and jarringly incongruous invocation of the concept of "comradeship."

While Molly and her dinner party guests compete by citing examples of their self-defined bounty towards their token "black friends," the inhabitants of the commune invert this rivalry. However, in so doing they consolidate the paradigm by succumbing to the same competitiveness in their recollections of unbidden "racist thoughts." This is the context in which Boyne contends that the compulsion 'to admit one's shortcomings to others, to measure oneself against some tacit common standard, is a part of the metaphysics of identity that structures Western society.'[76] As the atmosphere in the commune becomes heady with confession, the unchallenged and unexamined underlying attitudes function to allow their perpetrators to revel in their positions at centre-stage. Moreover, the salacious tone and the welter of examples insidiously establish these attitudes as "normal" and therefore as denoting "the truth." They subtextually introduce a "tacit common standard" and subtly imply that these

---

[74] Busi, A., *Seminar on Youth*, trans. by Stuart Hood (London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p. 81
[75] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 101
[76] Boyne, P. 140

attitudes, being "natural," are implicitly defensible as this is how, whether or not they admit it, everybody really thinks prior to the application of their "politics." This is the context in which Cooper contends that 'the pleasures of confession' are 'simply discursive recapitulations of the pleasures of non-discursive practice that they make articulate.'[77] Similarly, Fromm cites Isaac Meier of Ger's contention that ''whoever talks about and reflects upon an evil thing he has done, is thinking the vileness he has perpetrated, and what one thinks, therein is one caught [...]. Stir filth this way and that, and it is still filth [...]. You have done wrong? Then balance it by doing right.''[78] However, the implied sense of moral superiority the commune dwellers derive from the stirring of their filth prevents them from forgoing it by balancing wrong with right. The professed veneration of "good red blood and guts" is exposed as a mirror image cover-story concocted to deny the reality of unease that masquerades as pity and contempt. Even the less disturbing inhabitants conceive of the problem of "freedom" as a quantitative rather than a qualitative one, exemplifying the attitudes of those described by Fromm who are 'fascinated by the growth of freedom from powers *outside* [...] and are blinded to the fact of *inner* restraints, compulsions and fears, which tend to undermine the meaning of the victories freedom has won against its traditional enemies.'[79] Their substitution of inverted platitudes for more authentic overtly hostile ones encapsulates linguistically their mode of approach to "politics." For their professed opposition to the hated "establishment" preserves and transmits the syntactic foundations on which the establishment relies.

---

[77] Cooper, p. 126

[78] Fromm, E., *Man for Himself. An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 141

[79] Fromm, E., *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 91

Anticipating Foucault, Fromm contends that as means of maintaining conformity vehicles of oppression have evolved syncretically in the transition through Church to State to conscience to the anonymous authority of "common sense" and public opinion. 'Because we have freed ourselves from the older overt forms of authority, we do not see that we have become the prey of a new kind of authority. We have become automatons who live under the illusion of being self-willing individuals.'[80] The 'despair of the human automaton is fertile soil for the political purposes of Fascism'[81] on the microcosmic as well as on the macrocosmic level, as anticipated in *The Cold Country* and portrayed in the commune in *Strawberry Boy* where Bee's orchestrations not only meet with little resistance but tend to be avidly embraced. When Saul reflects that his "weak ego" must be to blame for his internalization of imposed definitions, although he is right to acknowledge his collusion, even the strongest ego would struggle to withstand the ontological assaults issuing from so many simultaneous levels. Saul is at a loss as to how to proceed because, as Foucault demonstrates, disciplinary micropowers seldom now operate through the mechanics of coercion 'that history and theory have accustomed us to expect from dominating powers.'[82] The fundamental indistinguishability of the attitudes of the Olsons and those that prevail in the commune is reinforced by the interchangeability of the tactics employed to convey and in the same breath deny them. On a microcosmic level, this phenomenon is illustrated by Orwell's assertion

---

[80] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 218

[81] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 221

[82] Allen, B., "Foucault and Modern Political Philosophy," in Moss, J. (ed.), *The Later Foucault* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 165

that 'we live in a lunatic world where opposites are constantly changing into one another.'[83]

Saul's attempts to negate the ontologically destructive effects of the Olsons by fleeing to the ostensibly antithetical world of the commune are thwarted in advance because these two worlds are mutually sustaining and the product of identical attitudes. This is the context in which the world of the novel is illuminated by a Foucauldian engagement with the problematics of power and social conflict. Such an analysis, to quote Racevskis, avoids 'the facile identifications and comfortable generalizations in which some established theoretical systems have demarcated the limits of good and evil, of progressive and reactionary forces, of friendly and enemy territories.'[84] Although at a first glance the commune in *Strawberry Boy* would appear to fall into the category of a "good," "progressive" and "friendly" territory, the divergence of actual attitudes from professed ideals, allied to Bee's insidious influence, means that its climate is not as it initially appears. This is not to say, however, that the "reactionary" world of the Olsons is by the same token any less hostile than it seems.

The world of the commune is contextualized by Konwicki's satirical reference to 'dissidents with life-long appointments. The regime has grown accustomed to them and they've grown accustomed to the regime. The opposition, the regime, they're the same thing, part and parcel of each other.'[85] In *Strawberry Boy*, Molly's instant withdrawal of her casual reference to the impending demolition of Saul's home is echoed by Bee's more conscious habit of placing Saul in a state of constant confusion.

---

[83] Orwell, G., "Review: Beggar My Neighbour," in *Collected Essays* volume 2, ed. by S. Orwell & I. Angus (New York: Harcourt, 1968), p. 314

> "The Fencemen don't want it [...]. So they've agreed to decanting after all. One or two blacks are OK. They make you feel quite emancipated and good. One nice strawberry boy in his red turtle-neck sweater and Maurice Chevalier cap [...]. But not more. Not black streets. Black wards [...]. I suspect the Fencemen have made a deal with the Housing Committee."[86]

This insidious sowing of the seeds of suspicion and doubt is a device employed to indicate and hence to establish the hierarchy of controller and controlled, and the power of definer over defined. Just as Molly distances herself by planting the blame at the feet of the landlord and implying her disapproval of his hypothetical plans, Bee evades responsibility for this articulation of her malice by scapegoating the Fencemen and expressing herself in the guise of reported speech. Her punishment of Saul's inadequate compliance is reinforced by the ultimately nonsensical but deliberately undermining proclamation "'But seriously, Saul, you *have* lost your people."'[87]

The main distinction between Molly's strategies and those employed by Bee is that Molly's games are designed primarily to confirm her idea of herself as someone "in the know," gently and tolerantly guiding an amateur through the vicissitudes of the "British way of life." Conversely Bee has a personal axe to grind; she wants vengeance on Saul for rejecting her tacit proposal that he become her token "black boyfriend," a further prop, along with baby and commune, to give her authenticity as a promoter of the "alternative way of life." 'Bee had invested everything in Saul. The Bomb was dead. Peace was a non-starter. Race was so hot she had invested there. And if Saul wouldn't be a militant and love her, she would make him into a militant only

---

[84] Racevskis, K., *Michel Foucault and the Subversion of the Intellect* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 119
[85] *A Minor Apocalypse*, p. 36
[86] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 136
[87] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 135

damned.'[88] This authorial intervention explicitly conveys the underlying nature of most of Saul's encounters throughout the novel. For with varying degrees of professionalism and conscious intent everyone seems determined to define him, a compulsion indicative of democratized formulations of power which, as Foucault demonstrates, are generative rather than repressive. Not only do they create and impose definitions, they concomitantly insidiously incite the connivance of the defined. This phenomenon is contextualized by O'Brien's proclamation in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: '"The command of the old despotism was "Thou shalt not." [...] Our command is "Thou art."'"[89] This is the sense in which micropolitical formulations of power are 'coercive without being violent.'[90] Constraint has become implicit since one can no more "be" something that contradicts whatever it is that one is incessantly told that one is than one could in the face of an outright prohibition. This is why Saul in *Strawberry Boy* reflects that a street gang would represent a release from the denied psychic violence of the social in its generality. For *actual* violence, being identifiable, displaces intimations of collusion, the question of which becomes increasingly crucial as Dawson's fiction develops. This is because her protagonists, by dint of circumstance rather than inclination, increasingly participate in the workings of society rather than simply chronicling their estrangement and unease. While force and external authority continue to exist in specific pockets of the social, the social in its entirety, in terms of its components, is marked by an authority so internalized as consensus that only in flashes can it be recognized at all.

Although Dawson's protagonists are defined by their ambivalence about their abortive attempts to identify with a group, the isolation of her later protagonists is

---

[88] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 151

[89] Orwell, G. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Signet, 1983), p. 211

portrayed as more intense because they find themselves in group situations whose underlying rationale they dimly perceive. Fromm's contention that 'instead of disappearing, authority has made itself invisible'[91] informs the world of *Strawberry Boy* where anonymous authority is the agent of Saul's destruction, as it was of Joanna's in *Fowler's Snare*. Be they central or purportedly peripheral, the assumptions of the secondary characters confirm and consolidate each other. In each case, anonymous authority manifests itself in the guise of what Fromm defines as

> common sense, [...] normality, [...] public opinion. It does not demand anything except the self-evident. It seems to use no pressure but only mild persuasion [...]. In anonymous authority both command and commander have become invisible. It is like being fired at by an invisible enemy. There is nobody and nothing to fight back against.[92]

In *Strawberry Boy*, the opening gambit of the landlord's agent, bearing his petition against the commune, encapsulates the nature of the tactics employed by the *status quo*: '"The square seems to be more or less in friendly consensus."'[93]

The irony is not only that the commune which symbolizes protest against the forcible decanting of existing tenants is dominated both politically and numerically by the very kinds of people for whom the way is being cleared but that this disproportionately represented "class" replicates microcosmically the attitudes of the urban planners to whom they are ostensibly opposed. The Borough Planning Committee, cartographer of the social, orchestrates "relocations" in the name of the plan, while Bee from the very heart of the symbol of resistance echoes the Committee's aims, aims that she purportedly wants to confound. For she is a metaphorical cartographer of the social to whom nobody exists except as a pawn to be

---

[90] May, p. 53
[91] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 144

sacrificed to her plan. The lip-service she pays to an apocryphal anti-authoritarianism is couched in the same vocabulary as that of the Committee, her references to "capitalist oppression" merging in a welter of meaninglessness with the Committee's invocation of "constructive dialogue." In neither case does this free-floating rhetoric bear any relation to anything, and those who invoke it to cover their tracks would certainly be hard pushed to say what they actually meant.

[92] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 144
[93] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 128

If left alone, Saul, like the community space, could have assimilated a range of interpretations and through his response to them emerged as an autonomous entity. However, this process is blocked by the structures represented by Bee and the Olsons who ignore the factors that have made him what he is and seek to displace them with their own definitions and fantasies. Instead of seeing a young man from Bognor with aspirations of becoming a zoologist, they insist on perceiving made it what it is. This imposition of Procrustean someone partly an incompetent and partly an exotic oddity, just as the Borough Planners' vision of the social space fails to encompass the reality of the people who make it and have identities is thus shown to operate through interlocking practices that engineer perceptions of the real. Nietzsche in *On The Genealogy of Morals* defines this grid of operations as "the social straitjacket," a device for rendering social subjects calculable and easy to control.[94] However, as Storm Jameson notes in *None Turn Back*, 'You can't draw an invisible line round fear and anxiety, as you draw it round the poor so that they remain in their slums out of your sight. If there is imbalance and fear it is everywhere at once.'[95]

While Bee in *Strawberry Boy* is keeping herself amused by enacting her vendetta against Saul and sowing the seeds of discontent in the commune, the tenants are being decanted all around. '"All this slum clearance is very nice for some people's pockets," Mrs Dew shouted over the partition. "And some people are going to get a knighthood out of it too."'[96]

---

[94] Nietzsche, F., *On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1998)
[95] Jameson, S., *None Turn Back* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 222
[96] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 148

"'Poor old Mrs Kilvers [...] was as stubborn as a mule, and she just kept saying "No No No." [...] I tell you [...], there's a lot of water being poured on the sea these days, and we don't half help it along [...]. It took them an hour to get her down."'[97] Since force unlike power precludes collusion, unlike Zay in *The Cold Country* Mrs. Kilvers is able to say no. However the distinction is blurred by the fact that defeat by force is viewed in the same terms, those of compliance, as defeat imposed by operations of power. '"Roll over when they say. Lie on your backside with yer legs in the air if they want you like that."'[98]

Bee's invocation of "capitalist oppression" ignores the reality of Mrs Dew and Mrs Kilvers. However, out of earshot of the inhabitants of the commune, these exchanges testify that the soon to be decanted tenants are well aware not only of the reality that underlies the Planning Committee's jargon but also of their own compliance in "rolling over" and "helping things along." The Szaszian contention that 'to rob the public it is necessary to deceive it. To deceive it it is necessary to persuade it that it is being robbed for its own benefit'[99] is confounded by the response of the tenants in *Strawberry Boy* to the Planning Committee's ostensibly "hidden" agenda. Although indisputably the public is being robbed and the Planners' jargon aims to deceive, it seems irrelevant that this deception fails because, once force is established, the subtle persuasion through which power articulates itself only needs to be cursorily invoked.

> "...Well, of course, it *is* a slum, only it's taken them fifty years to discover that." [...] The rain stopped and there was a terrible silence, as though the Bomb had been used and people were crouched in the street trying not to

---

[97] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 169
[98] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 171
[99] *A Lexicon of Lunacy*, p. 145

> move or stir the air or feel or simulate living things - for that would only court disaster and invite the next move.[100]

This paralysis, portrayed by Dawson as an internalization of the shadow of the Bomb where no one dares resist for fear of jarring the mechanism, lulls the whole community into submission. Saul is made especially aware of this paralysis by the continual mutation of perceived alternatives into consolidation of constraint. 'The "Saul Penfold" session [...] had left him numb and mechanical and with a feeling of vast waves of fatuity round any possible relationship [...]. He wanted to shout "Don't treat me like a thing." But he began to feel he *was* a thing. "Soon I won't feel anything at all."'[101] The extent of his self-estrangement is conveyed by the fact that he feels no sense of connection even with the "thing" he has become. Fromm discusses the way in which the

> substitution of pseudo acts for original acts of thinking, feeling, and willing, leads eventually to the replacement of the original self by a pseudo self [...]. The pseudo self is only an agent who actually represents the rôle a person is supposed to play but who does so under the name of the self [...], being essentially a reflex of other people's expectations of him [...]. In order to overcome the panic resulting from such loss of identity, he is compelled to conform, to seek his identity by continuous approval and recognition by others. Since he does not know who he is, at least the others will know - if he acts according to their expectation; if they know, he will know too, if he only takes their word for it.[102]

Yet despite Saul's outward compliance with the expectations of others, his awareness of the dynamic leads him inexorably to breakdown. As a solitary character who tries to puzzle things out for himself rather than relying on slogans (headstones marking the graves of the critical faculties), he is conscious of his systematic invasion by this

---

[100] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 172
[101] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 131
[102] *The Fear of Freedom*, pp. 177-8

stealthily encroaching "pseudo self." A coldly detached, observing inner eye seems the only residue the self has left behind.

Dawson's novels are characterized by the presence of a lingering image encapsulating the self-perception of each of her protagonists, whose experiences establish a network of chords that resonate with reference to this image. Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* interprets the vertiginous absurdity and futility of existence through the metaphor of flies making their way across a ceiling while Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* develops an obsession with the purposeless Pavlovian leaps of circus dogs through hoops. In *Strawberry Boy* Saul's perception of his experience is conveyed by the colour plate of a small brown fish on a page of his neglected zoology text book.

> Down its side in pink-and-white freckled scales and cartilage you could make out a great toothy smile - half-menacing, half-ingratiating.
>
> "Protective camouflage," he explained. "[...] That nasty phoney grin scares the predators away. It took ten thousand years to evolve that smile."

Ruth's response is the crux of the novel. "'What a waste of time [...]. If it had ten thousand years to play about with, why couldn't it have grown bigger and swifter with a sword on the end of its snout and brutal teeth, instead of that half-pie bit of pavement art down its side?"'[103]

The evolution of these images in Dawson's fiction reveals an increasing, if increasingly conflict-ridden, sense of connection between her protagonists and the wider social world through which they move. While Josephine's Sisyphean image is purely existential, Joanna's betrays underlying intimations of a ringmaster and audience by whom her behaviour is controlled. In Saul's image the purely ontological is further eclipsed by the need for survival within a community (whose proposed

destruction ironically threatens to deny him a context in which to try to survive). As he perceives it, the potential for an authentic identity is pre-emptively subsumed by the need for the pacification of potential attackers. The significance of this smile is illuminated by Bernard Wolfe whose arguments are cited by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). ''It pleases us to portray the Negro showing us all his teeth in a smile made for us. And his smile - as we make it - always means a *gift*.''[104] However, as in Saul's case, rather than being freely given this smile is produced by a skewed dynamic. The presence of fear establishes a habit in which the smiler becomes enmeshed, regardless of the likelihood of actual attack. For the true attack is the ontological one of the very imposition of such a habit. Wolfe further contends that black people ''are kept in their obsequious attitude by the extreme penalties of fear and force, and this is common knowledge to both the whites and the blacks. Nevertheless, the whites demand that the blacks be always smiling, attentive and friendly in all their relationships with them.''[105] Saul's sense of collusion conceptually replicates that of Zay in *The Cold Country* who finds herself playing along in accordance with the set of rules established as consensus by her attacker. Since Saul's energies are focused on maintaining his servile smile, the rest of his life has ground to a standstill. 'He wanted more than ever now to get to a university. But when he got in from a day in the office he found he couldn't concentrate [...]. "I am a sub-editor and research assistant," he would remind himself,'[106] a poignant reminder that dramatizes the self's strangulation at the ruthless hands of the pseudo self.

---

[103] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 8

[104] cited in Fanon, F., *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: The Pluto Press, 1993), p. 49

[105] *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 50

[106] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 10

The vestiges of the true self are only discernible when they function to observe the pseudo self. The source of the sensation of "vast waves of fatuity" defining every possible relationship is Saul's internalization of social attitudes. Even at the Tate he feels overwhelmed by what is less paranoia than anticipation logically inferred from prior experience. 'Bee might follow him and kiss him in front of the "Red Carpet." An American tourist might offer him a catalogue or take his photograph. Ruth might come tripping in with a bath-chair:

"Is Saul Penfold here please?"'[107] Even Ruth who is too preoccupied with her own survival to recruit a fantasy image of him for purposes of her own is categorized alongside all those who induce the encroachment of his pseudo self.

Adorno contends that 'today's world, which offers such a strong reality basis for everybody's sense of being persecuted, calls for paranoid characters.'[108] However the mutually reinforcing pressures of temperament and circumstance mean that entities within the social body are prey to varying degrees of paranoia, since a concatenation of factors situates everyone differently within the network of power. Everyone is equally enmeshed, in that those who act as power's transmission wires are no less enslaved by it than those on whom it is exercised since it 'passes through the dominated forces no less than through the dominating.'[109] Yet certain social subjects are more prone than others to this systematic "weakening of the ego." In Saul's case, power's productive nature is manifested by the way that it incites him to submit to the paralysis of helplessly beholding the relentless advance of his pseudo self as it systematically consolidates itself and eclipses the person he wants to become. This

---

[107] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 133

[108] Adorno, T., *The Stars Down To Earth and other essays on the irrational in culture*, ed. by Crook, S. (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 122

annexation and process of displacement produces an automaton whose every move the powerless self sees as being preordained, just as the soon to be decanted tenants helplessly await their relocation.

> *The Baby cried. He knew that would happen. He knew it all* [...]. *"Who's got a lovely Daddy with a nice beard coming? Who's going for a lovely walk in the park?"*
>
> *And all the time in his imagination, Saul was strolling with Wersby at Kew talking precisely about genetic manipulation: "But if you legislated along those lines you'd be simply writing a blank cheque for behaviourist politicians."* [110]

Saul's mistrust echoes that of Zay in *The Cold Country* who, since all her encounters have culminated in a divergence from what she would have wanted, presumes the one with Dickie will be the same. This pessimistic premonition generates a self-fulfilling prophecy where the less she expects to be understood the less she bothers to articulate herself and consequently the more remote the chance of him deciphering the signs. Similarly, Ruth's predicament in *Strawberry Boy* recalls that of Dickie in *The Cold Country* since both are at the mercy of events, although less decisively so than either Saul or Zay. Thus they are rejected as allies and cast as persecutors as this is what everyone else has always been. This phenomenon exemplifies the isolation born of people's discrete locations within the network of power. Just as everything Zay experiences recalls in different registers her experience of being raped as a child, everyone Saul encounters is construed as being fixated on his "race." Thus a defining event or state focuses the more oblique operations of power to which Dickie and Ruth are also subject but which they fail to formulate into a system with a specific genesis.

---

[109] *Foucault*, p. 27
[110] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 75

Ransom argues that whereas 'with violence, the body is directly touched,' exercises of power 'are designed to influence the *actions* - rather than the *bodies* - of the persons they are addressed to.'[111] However neither Zay nor Saul is tormented as much by the violence itself as they are by the belief that they connived. The Deleuzean definition of power as a 'relation' not an 'attribute'[112] highlights its collaborative dynamic. Zay cannot forgive herself for the way 'her skin, her pride, her position as a guest, made her connive'[113] any more than Saul can for the ingratiating smile he affixes to himself which replicates the pattern that adorns the fish in his zoology textbook. The preoccupation with complicity, regardless of the degree to which complicity objectively exists, tends to be all the more psychically destructive if states or events which induce collusion are easily identifiable ones. Saul's self-loathing and contempt for his obsequious smile fuse with his nightmare image of carting around an alien instrument upon which the "benevolent" liberals avidly await his performance.

Richard Wright in his autobiography captures precisely this sense of collusion with one's own oppression. 'The whole of my being felt violated, and I knew that my own fear had helped to violate it.'[114] While when subject to force one's rage can be absorbed by an identifiable enemy, the dynamic charge of anonymous power, which acts as a binding agent of the social, induces internalization of the notion of consensus. Foucault demonstrates how the transition of the strategies through which the charge of power is activated, transmitted and executed operates on two simultaneous levels. Firstly the dynastic has been largely superseded by dynamic and democratized codifications which incite conceptual internalization of the Panopticon's

---

[111] Ransom, p. 123
[112] *Foucault*, p. 27
[113] *The Cold Country*, p. 101
[114] Wright, R., *Black Boy* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1977), pp. 168-9

central tower, producing a social network of self- and mutually-policing entities. Moreover the censor has evolved into a censor by *implication*, with social reality (and the perceptions of it which produce and are produced by it) no longer limited and suppressed but continually generated and reinforced. Bettelheim's contention that in the concentration camp context most people 'start out hating the system' but end up hating themselves even more[115] focuses the continuum of "extreme" and "normal" situations. This tendency towards introjection is embodied by the experience of Saul in *Strawberry Boy*, although in his case hostility towards the system is *pre-empted* by hostility towards himself. This phenomenon is clarified by the Szaszian contention that every kind of violation imposes a "double abuse." For the act itself is inevitably accompanied by changes in the personality of the "abused," 'wrought by his submissive position vis-à-vis his exploiters.' This second effect, personality modification, is 'more insidious and more difficult to remedy' since it produces a situation where 'the oppressed adopts the aspirations and values of the oppressor.'[116] Saul's predicament is compounded by the fact that his personality has not so much been changed by this enforced submission as constructed with reference to it, so that even his aspirations seem simply a negation of a negation.

In *The Cold Country* the suicide of Zay represents a fusion of victim and aggressor whereas Saul's behaviour in *Strawberry Boy* represents a splitting of the two. Having internalized, often in parodic form, the attitudes he provokes, he projects this introjection even onto "innocent" non-aggressors. Having come to perceive himself as something between a fatuous grin and a non-operational instrument, he loses faith in Ruth because he fails to see what on earth she sees in him. In his mind's

---

115 *The Informed Heart. Autonomy in a Mass Age*, p. 285
116 *Law, Liberty and Psychiatry*, p. 195

eye he reduces her to a functional intermediary, interceding on his behalf and arbitrating with the enemy world through which he imagines her to be able to move with ease. 'She was interviewing the composer for him; liaising about rent [...]. "Tell him he can stay."

"Saul, you may stay."'[117] Saul's escapist fantasies of debating genetic engineering with Wersby represent his "true self" seeking to resist annihilation. Here he would be the expert, his knowledge of his subject eclipsing his race, although Dawson implicitly raises the question of whether this "true self" is in fact true or simply the product of unconscious counter-mystification.

---

117 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 52

"Saul" And Wersby: Fantasies Of Union And The Rejection Of Myths

Although superficially the Olsons' smug paternalism seems diametrically opposed to the professed ideals of the commune, the two worlds substructurally replicate each other. Similarly, although superficially no two characters seem less aligned than Saul and Wersby, paradoxically they feel intimations of kinship, primarily because both reject the hypocrisies of the group where chatter demeans and then abolishes thought. Wersby resists 'language for its inaccuracy. There were thousands of words and thousands of languages and each was fixed only arbitrarily and erratically to a sense. The notation for sounds on the other hand was exact. The sound anchored precisely to a mark.'[118] Furthermore Dawson links them stylistically by presenting their unspoken ontological struggles in a series of italicized fantasy scenarios through which their inner lives unfold. Høeg's contention that 'understanding is something one does best [...] on the borderline'[119] informs the development of these two characters although, as Robert Bono notes, 'there's a difference between marginality that has been chosen' and marginality which has been 'imposed.'[120] Yet although Saul's marginality has unarguably been imposed by the range of responses evoked by his race, Wersby's in a sense has also been imposed rather than chosen, albeit by temperament and not by circumstance.

The unexpected convergence of the lives of these two men ironically results from one of the Olsons' paternalistic gestures, since Saul is in need of somewhere to live and Wersby needs a lodger. Though they barely exchange a word, each takes on a symbolic function within the other's inner life. Saul's first impression (of 'abstract

---

[118] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 23-4
[119] Høeg, P., *Borderliners* (London: The Harvill Press, 1996), p. 33
[120] Kritzman, p. 165

posters done after the Russian Revolution' rather than the usual 'genteelly-misspelt insults pinned on the walls'[121]) convinces him that only here could his true self, the self that he envisages for himself, be realized. 'It was the way Wersby accepted him without the stretched-up smile of Mrs. Olson; without Ruth's anxiety to shield.'[122]

Molly's colonialist blindness to Saul's true self is mirrored by the Planning Committee's attitude to the tenants who must be "cleared" for its vision of the land to be actualized. '"Roll over. Make way. And in return we'll give you central heating and fitted cupboards and a community relations officer and a course in adjustment and some tranquillizer pills."'[123] For Molly's preconceptions to be fulfilled, any vestiges of Saul's identity must first be erased and then replaced by an eager-to-please and emasculated automaton. A lowly position as her husband's sub-editor and research assistant and sporadic invitations to her social gatherings fulfil the same function as the Planners' proposed appeasement of the tenants to be driven from their homes. Although as the commune reveals its true nature Saul comes to realize the extent to which 'his fantasy of Wersby' has 'swollen,'[124] Wersby's silence drives him to a temporary enactment of Bee's vengeful fantasy of making him "a militant, only damned." This endeavour is illuminated by Cooper's analysis of how 'inauthentically functioning groups need a victim, who can in due course be dismissed as "paranoid," to embody the negative aspects of everyone's feeling.'[125] However Saul's ostensible compliance with Bee's stereotype, which represents a doomed attempt to shed the previous one, proves no less counter-productive than his exchange of Olson territory for the commune. Vocalizing all he has internalized over the years brings him no

---

[121] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 18
[122] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 73
[123] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 146-7
[124] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 107

closer to attaining his ideal of dignity and respect as a zoologist than continuing to hide behind a self-deprecating smile could ever have done.

> "I see. I see. So it's black monkeys eff off is it? Is it? [...] Take me to Effra Road, Brixton [...]. Take me to Brixton," Saul shouted at the conductor, tearing at the ticket with his teeth [...]. "Do you think that black men are stupid and unborn and have no feelings?" He beat his head with his clenched fist.[126]

Anonymous authority being impossible to resist, except interstitially, he has not only misdirected his rage but in so doing completed the self-fulfilling prophecy established by the normalizing drive. What distinguishes Wersby from Peter is his gradual, self-willed engagement with the phenomenon of prejudice in which he is enmeshed. For unlike Wersby Peter not only unquestioningly accepts each social premise which has engineered Saul's downfall, he adopts the rôle of Pilate in his efforts to absolve himself from blame.

> "Land and property always bring out the worst in people [...]. But that fire-raising... That's not us. It was just a few local fascist heavies tied up with these harassing landlords [...]. I mean, those Hell's Angels will be caught and sent down and Miss Gordon will surely go to Holloway. In the meantime, will you come and stay with Molly and me? Will you consider coming back to S.E.C. in a more senior position?" But Saul didn't even bother to reply. He just hit his skull and called:
>
> "Black shit out."[127]

Not only is Peter's insistent "that's not us" irrelevant in terms of its effects on Saul, it fails to consider that it was the stifling condescension of his *own* world that prompted Saul to seek refuge in the commune in the first place. Furthermore, the prospect of the punishment of the perpetrators of one specific episode is unlikely to afford a great deal of consolation to someone on whom the damage has been relentless and systematic.

---

[125] *The Grammar of Living*, p. 62
[126] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 161
[127] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 163

Neither is it likely that the patronising offer of a "more senior position" will reverse or even palliate what Saul has been induced to see as his cumulative and irrevocable "damnation."

Saul and Wersby are aligned in their preoccupation with the question of complicity and the impulse towards its interstitial transcendence. Fromm cites Goethe's argument that 'only if we can "imagine ourselves as the author of any conceivable crime," and mean it, can we be reasonably sure of having dropped the mask and of being on the way to becoming aware of who we are.'[128] This assertion informs the distinction between Wersby and Peter in the novel. For despite Peter's social chatter and contact with other people, he never even hypothetically conceives of himself as accountable for anything that befalls them. Conversely, despite Wersby's solitude and ostensible misanthropy, he comes to see that nobody's hands are clean. The juxtaposition of his attitude with those of the Olsons is not only illuminated by Fromm's contention that 'relatedness to others is not identical with physical contact,'[129] it in fact suggests an inverse correlation between the two. Despite having believed himself to be 'sceptical of every myth,'[130] after Saul's departure Wersby sees that his attitudes are subliminally infiltrated by the very myths he consciously rejects. He is assailed by dreadful visions of Saul rearranging his china '*to fit in his own red plastic jugs* [...] *of unrefined coconut oil* [...], *making calls to Nairobi and Lagos* [...], *talking to Wersby in an African language. The only words he could understand were "getting enough keys cut."*'[131] In response he hears his own repressed and peevish

---

[128] *The Art of Being*, p. 76
[129] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 15
[130] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 29
[131] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 40

voice: "'*Why have you put my carvings into obscene postures again?*"'[132] Yet it gradually dawns on him that these stereotypical images he has unwittingly absorbed are devices semi-consciously designed to dissolve anticipated allegations of guilt.

> *More transistors, pin-ups and stolen library books [...]. Why do you come here and live on our National Assistance and rob our libraries? [...] Soon the flat would be full of children. Her hips were relentlessly full of them [...]. He caught sight of the plate he had tipped his supper onto [...]. His grandfather had been in the merchant navy and brought it back from Canton. But now that the black man was standing there, he saw that it had been looted from a Chinese temple.*[133]

Thus, unlike Peter, he betrays an awareness of the temporal and spatial links between the different auspices under which the colonialist outlook operates, on a continuum of attitudes and actions.

Saul and Wersby are also aligned in their preoccupation with the oppressive imminence of "vast waves of fatuity" that for Wersby only music can eclipse and overcome. Saul withdraws from the threat of this fatuity through a process of defamiliarization, symbolized by zoological images that fulfil the same function as Josephine's hallucinated animals in *The Ha-Ha*. 'His mind would wander from their voices to the alveoli of their lungs that out of a bit of foul oxygen could produce all these words and smiles and exclamations of interest and surprise.'[134] Wersby's immersion in music represents an attempt to transcend the same persistent intimations of fatuity. However his solipsism is negated by the reflex that calls it forth. For instead of just feeling preyed upon by fantasy persecutors, he begins to apprehend himself through their hypothetical eyes. Sass maintains that 'if the solipsist [...] *has* an experience of the existence of his own consciousness, this must be because he is

---

[132] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 41
[133] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 42

implicitly adopting a perspective from without - the standpoint of some other consciousness who can take the solipsist's consciousness as its object.'[135] For Wersby, however, the projection into an external vantage point is more than just implied. His self-referentiality dissolves when he encounters himself from a fantasized external perspective. As he listens to the fantasy Wersby spuriously citing music as a pretext for his social and political evasion he deconstructs his motivations and examines the foundations of his life. While Sass highlights the way in which the form of solipsism by definition challenges its ontological premise, Wersby's fantasy interlocutors develop the point by constituting its content. Høeg proposes that 'inside even the most paranoid suspicion the sense of humanity and the desire for contact are waiting to emerge.'[136] This contention is applicable to Wersby whose ostensible misanthropy and solipsism (mutually exclusive in themselves) are belied by his engagement with the dilemma. The transformation of his fantasy persecutors into figures justifiably seeking revenge signifies a further stage in the evolution of his understanding. At first he hears his whining voice accusing and complaining. '"*And please," he heard his sharp landlady voice, "take that red plastic jug of dog-fat away from my bust of Bach.*"'[137] Then he hears it ineffectually trying to absolve him from blame. '"It was an opera about race I was just embarking on. It was about the absurdity of a national myth as a way of giving meaning to life [...]. It was my grandfather not me who looted temples [...]. I'm an artist and art is neutral."'[138] Unlike Peter, Wersby is partially redeemed as a character by the fact that he resists excluding himself from the contortions of the stereotypes who populate his fantasies. In fact, in the same way that Saul feels more

---

[134] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 11
[135] Sass, p. 71
[136] Høeg, P. *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (London: The Harvill Press, 1996), p. 41
[137] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 113

loathing for his own conniving smile than he does for the people and structures contributing to his downfall, Wersby is more troubled by his own parochial and ingratiating ways than he is by his fantasy tormentors. This phenomenon contains a kernel of hope. For although self-blame and obsessive psychic self-flagellation can become a pseudo-justificatory pretext for the continued evasion of action, it is only through the acknowledgement of collusion that change can be conceptualized and thus brought into being. The evolution of Wersby's awareness of how his guilt "has been made" suggests that he can "begin to unmake it" and thus counteract its effects.

In *The Politics of Experience,* Laing demonstrates how the phenomenon of "splitting" into observer and observed tends to be experienced as a mechanistic and "impersonal process" outside the subject's control. Thus it is not phenomenologically invalid to refer to this process as a "defence mechanism" since 'the person as he experiences himself is dissociated' from it and considers it to be something that he passively undergoes. However 'as he becomes de alienated he is able first of all to become aware' of this process 'and then to take the second, even more crucial, step, of progressively realizing that these are things he does or has done to himself.'[139] Wersby is unusual in that his psychic contortions reveal to him that, like the contemplation of stereotypes, the stance of *mea culpa* is a starting point and not the conclusion for which Bee and her acolytes mistake it. It is this that incites him to take responsibility for "what he makes of what he is made of." Having identified the origins of the archetypes of his projected fantasy interlocutors and accepted responsibility for their unbidden presence in his mind, Wersby takes the third step of trying to assimilate the revelation and seeking to enact it in his life. '"It was my grandfather not me. It was he

---

[138] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 43
[139] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 30

who took your women and scorched your land and felled your trees and killed your animals and shot you with cannons when you came against him with sticks.'"[140] Through his ancestry he sees himself as a beneficiary of and hence as an accomplice to his forbears' imagined crimes. However this over-simplified and worthless self-condemnatory pose is eclipsed by the hallucinated accusations he "hears," which encapsulate the crux of the dynamic. '"Your work is fatuous. Your life is idle. And because it's idle you have grown petty and cruel.'"[141] The evolution of Wersby's inner drama reveals his semi-conscious understanding that his preoccupation with the "racial past" and his affectations of racial shame are invoked to mask a more personal sense of guilt. For his treatment of Saul has compounded and encapsulates the very injustice from which he seeks refuge in his music. It dawns on Wersby, as it never does on Bee or on the Olsons, that the phenomenon of prejudice is primarily a ruse for the sublimation of denied discontent with one's own limitations, self-imposed or otherwise.

Peter's denial of both prejudice and discontent blocks his potential to recognize the strategies he unconsciously draws upon to "keep Saul in his place." Any intimation is projected onto Molly, while Peter conveniently chooses to ignore the fact that not only has he presumably chosen both his wife and his way of life but also that their attitudes only quantitatively differ. '"Why do you keep up with people you despise? [...] This isn't a soup kitchen. You aren't the Lady with the Lamp. This is for real, and Saul doesn't want your smiles [...]. He wants to be a zoologist.'"[142] While snidely accusing Molly of doling out metaphorical soup, he fails to discern the analogy between this soup and his own ineffectual overtures to Saul when he offers

---

[140] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 110
[141] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 111

him a "more senior position." These projection tactics are mirrored by Saul's behaviour to Ruth, 'his answer' to the stifling repression of his childhood, symbolized in his memory by the 'transparent plastic covers over the chairs' and the 'pretence they kept up' that his mother had only gone to Jamaica 'on a visit.'[143] Because Ruth only represents the attempt at an answer to something for him, he assumes that he fulfils a similar function. Despite being highly attuned to people's compulsive replacement of his identity with more convenient versions of their own, he displays an ironic lack of insight into his own enactment of an identical process on Ruth. He absorbs the premise of his friend Jack's implied allegations (""Is she white? [...] Does she make you do tribal dances with war-bones in your ears?"'[144]) and starts to see her as she is seen, rather than relying on his own experience of her. Wersby, by contrast, instinctively grasps both how and why he has come to absorb the very myths he consciously rejects.

> "*It was I who impaled his humming-birds* [...]." *Wersby had lived alone too long.*
>
> For years he had avoided other people - ever since the cellist he had fallen in love with had described his work as "high-pitched titters" and went to live with the conductor who had fed him this thought.[145]

By confirming his status as someone on the borderline, this passing reference to Wersby's "sexuality" further aligns him with Saul. The divergence of Wersby's and Peter's attitudes is encapsulated by their response to Saul. For while the Olsons are reassured by their image of a Saul who accepts with gratitude the palliatives with which they suppress his reality, Wersby's hallucinations only become intolerable at the point at which his tormentors mutate into slaves. Dawson's fiction of the 1970s

---

[142] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 68
[143] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 70

explores how passivity paves the way for destruction, whether of the community or of individual. However *Strawberry Boy* departs from *The Cold Country* in its focus on the counter-productiveness of simplistic formulations of the *rejection* of passivity, as dramatized by the predictable fate of the commune. Nonetheless, *Strawberry Boy* continues to engage with the dangers of "rolling over" and "making way."

Wersby survives the onslaughts of his tormentors and accusers primarily because they never coincide with any reality likely to confront him. However the slaves who replace them threaten his grasp on "reality" by symbolically reflecting the friend of the Olsons who appears at his door and retains his dignity in the face of Wersby's superciliousness. When the taunts and recriminations transmute into meek expressions of devotion, Wersby's "reality" begins to recede to the point at which he starts to suspect that the cockroaches are able to '*read his thoughts*.'[146] Virginia Woolf claimed to believe that 'the degradation of being a slave' is equalled only by that 'of being a master.'[147] Yet, as inferred from the degree to which this fantasized position precipitates "breakdown," for Wersby the horror of being a master far surpasses that of being a slave. ""I've given up music,"" he 'assures the white tyrant who always seemed to be with him now [...]. "So you needn't follow me."'[148] Having shed its disguise of hallucinated vocal and vengeful black squatters, the tyrant locked inside him (or so he believes) reveals its identity as the real object of censure and reproach. The internal tyrant reabsorbs the psychic energy projected onto its scapegoats and proxies, instantly transforming them into a fawning servile horde.

---

[144] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 49
[145] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 112
[146] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 120
[147] letter to "The New Statesman," Oct. 16th 1920, in Trautmann Banks, J., *Congenial Spirits. Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1993), p. 127
[148] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 118

"'*There is no revenge. We are here to serve you.*"'[149] Wersby deconstructs the process where repressed self-doubt, experienced as unease in the face of a complex reality, is converted into hostility and disguised by inversion as the fear of external threat. His intimations of the futility of his work, experienced as an unspecified malaise, are sublimated into resentment of the psychic figures onto whom these allegations are projected, a sublimation initially focused as the fear of being driven from his home. Furthermore he discerns the correlation between this process and the outcome of the proposals of the Borough Planning Committee. 'Wersby stared at the institutions of orderly psychosis [...]. The psychosis was more orderly now. Better socialized, institutionalized. He was the Borough. He was the obsessive and particular god who preserves and cherishes the part but panics at change or enlargement or mixing.'[150]

If Peter and Molly knew and liked each other and themselves (mutually exclusive though these hypotheses might be), and if a tide of music would come to Wersby and lift him, it seems unlikely that what Saul comes to symbolize (although only Wersby confronts this symbolism) would hold such significance for them. As it is, he becomes a focus for the tenuousness of Peter's sense of self-worth - "'I wish I had such confidence in our value"'[151] - and for Wersby's fears that the allegations are justified and that his musical compositions are simply "high-pitched titters." Canetti argues that

> distrust itself is a defence against fear [...]. It postulates a threat which far exceeds the threat of fear [...]. But [...] it takes in more and more, and ultimately turns into an automatic creator of fear. For, cold and hard as it may act, it is nourished by the same hostile power which it wants to protect us against.[152]

---

[149] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 125
[150] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 174
[151] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 68
[152] *The Human Province*, p. 239

In *Strawberry Boy*, whereas Wersby develops an awareness of the defensive purpose his projections serve, the Olsons, who misconstrue their projections as reality indicators, assume them to objectively exist. Thus they wait for this to be borne out and simultaneously help it along to complete the self-fulfilling prophecy. Although Wersby's insight is revealed by his identification of himself with the Borough, panicking at "change," "enlargement" and "mixing," he overlooks the vital ontological distinctions. On a practical level he never seeks to assuage his anxieties by attempting to incite the real to conform to his fantasy image of it. On an epistemological level he forges an awareness of what motivates the processes unfolding in his mind, an awareness containing the seeds of his potential breakthrough.

The "Consensus" Fear Of External Threat As A Binding Agent Of The Group

The Cold Country explores the mutually-consolidating means by which reality-draining categories insinuate themselves through rhetorical euphemisms and distortions. Not only are individuals and communities "kept in their place," but the presence of the Bomb is portrayed as a sword of Damocles, illustrating how the invocation of external threat conceptually consolidates the group. This theme, encapsulated by the slogan-chanting battalions of the "Civil Defence League," is engaged with more fully in *Strawberry Boy* where Dawson presents a retrospective aspect of the herd's mobilization against a perceived external threat, a strategic device for siphoning off the surplus denied hostility of the group. While in *The Cold Country* a hypothetical *future* threat is envisaged, *Strawberry Boy* explores this phenomenon with hindsight. The residue of obsession with defence against a *past* threat is shown to be diverted onto "local" scapegoats when the threat posed by external ones can no longer be conceptually sustained. The construction and maintenance of this new class of scapegoats is a prerequisite for ensuring the integrity of "the group." As Laing and Cooper argue, 'the pledged group is a common product of reciprocities mediated under the statute of violence,'[153] a violence which is ever-present whether latent or being exercised.

Robert Graves contends that after the First World War a 'war-madness' ran wild everywhere, 'looking for a pseudo-military outlet. The civilians talked a foreign language and it was newspaper language.'[154] Just as it is irrelevant for power to change hands if its paradigmatic structure remains in place, the substitution of new

scapegoats for old merely consolidates the underlying equation. When critical awareness is sacrificed at the altar of the slogans that replace it, the slogans' grammatical construction goes unchallenged since as in the phenomenon of power the content is dictated by the form. With reference to the Second World War, the novelist E.L. Doctorow develops the concerns expressed by Graves. 'Unfortunately, the necessary emotional fever for fighting a war cannot be turned off like a water tap. Enemies must continue to be found. The mind and heart cannot be demobilized as quickly as the platoon.'[155] Thus the metaphorical flow of water is simply diverted into another channel. This phenomenon renders intelligible the unacknowledged factors that motivate the behaviour of the characters in *Strawberry Boy* for, as Veyne contends, 'the chessmen are what the successive configurations of the chessboard make of them.'[156] 'A building stone becomes a keystone or a header only when it takes its place as part of a structure.'[157] Thus although the Olsons perpetuate social assumptions, they are also the product of the grid that they consolidate. Peter's doubts, especially, are illuminated by Laing's contention that 'a social norm may come to impose an oppressive obligation on everyone, although few people feel it to be their own.'[158]

Strawberry Boy contextualizes the "re-channelling" process referred to by Doctorow by presenting Wersby as a product of the Second World War. Although the Olsons are of Wersby's generation they seem oblivious to the effects of their social background of violence, suspicion and the obsession with defence. However Wersby

---

153 *Reason and Violence*, p. 137
154 Graves, R., *Goodbye To All That* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 188
155 *The Book of Daniel*, p. 23
156 Veyne, P., "Foucault Revolutionizes History," trans. by C. Porter, *Foucault and his Interlocuters*, p. 177
157 Veyne, p. 168
158 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 65

recalls that the words from the radio ""Unconditional surrender!"" signified to him only that the world had 'gone mad' and

> become a ballroom [...]. The war was over but he had never known anything but war and he couldn't see what all the fuss was about [...]. War was an evil he had never *not* known. His parents' talk in the Thirties about the First World War had blended in his child's mind with the Spanish Civil War and Abyssinia. It had never occurred to him when he was nine and the Second World War was declared that they had been - 'til then - at peace. [159]

Foucault's recollection that 'the menace of war was our background, our framework of existence. Then the war arrived'[160] implies that the conceptual construction of the social, underpinned by the wholesale manipulation of language, not only defines but far outlasts the perceptions this manipulation instils. Deleuze and Guattari propose that after the Second World War the war machine 'no longer had war as its exclusive object' but took as its object peace. 'This is where the inversion of Clausewitz's formula comes in: it is politics that becomes the continuation of war; *it is peace that technologically frees the unlimited material process of total war.*'[161] This inversion contextualizes Foucault's rhetorical question: 'Isn't power a sort of generalized war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the state? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it.'[162] Since the "war machine" by definition develops in relation to whatever apparatus appropriates it, war is relegated to a pretext for the machine's consolidation. Even though war manifests as force what in "peace-time" exerts its effects as power, these effects of power are constantly evident in the rhetoric that precipitates explicit manifestations of the machine. Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* casts light on this transition when a 'plane from

---

159 *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 28-9

160 Kritzman, p. 7

161 Deleuze, G. & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by B. Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 467

which bombs have only recently been dropped is converted into a vehicle and tool of advertising and thus becomes a means of shaping perceptions of the social.[163] Eco explores the phenomenon of the *status quo*'s need for 'a power structure in which everyone is consentient and prepared to recognize himself as part of that structure.' To this end, legitimizing rhetoric intervenes to produce an ideology of consensus.[164]

Deleuze and Guattari further contend that 'the State is not a point taking all the others upon itself, but a resonance chamber for them all.'[165] The resonance is produced by a conceptual "meta-power," while what resonate are the different modes of its articulation. This dynamic informs *Strawberry Boy* through the juxtaposition and resonance of the structures and functions that Dawson's characters dramatize, with "the State" manifested micropolitically as the notion of internalized consensus. The urge to categorize is equally evident in the formulaic if contradictory images of "the black" that the workings of power induce Saul to internalize and in the Planners' vision of the social space to which the use of force incites its inhabitants to submit.

In Foucauldian terms "there is no outside of power" because each social subject colludes in its perpetual reproduction. There is thus no vantage point external to the processes of which the social subject is the product, the transmission wire and the activating charge. Foucault therefore emphasised the interstitial perspective, and it is the liberatory potential of the interstitial that Wersby tries to access and celebrate through music.

---

[162] Foucault, M., "Truth and Power," in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 65
[163] Woolf, V., *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Harvest Books, 1990)
[164] "Language, Power, Force," in *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, p. 247
[165] *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 224

Wersby's Interstitial Resistance: "Hope, Forgiveness And Surprise"

The juxtaposition of Wersby's memories and fantasies implies that he dimly perceives the factors that have made him what he is. Høeg contends that 'those who describe the machine are still part of it, are themselves cogs, and the tale a cog in motion tells *has* to be a muddled tale.'[166] Wersby tries to unravel and transcend this "muddled tale" through his attempts to sublimate it into music. At first, however, music functions as a pretext for evasion, conceptually replicating the function of "survival" as interpreted by Dickie in *The Cold Country*. Similarly just as Dickie questions his obsession with survival only as an indirect result of Zay's suicide, in *Strawberry Boy* it takes the sacrifice of Saul to induce Wersby's engagement with the processes in which he is enmeshed. At the close of the novel, the letter from Saul's mother (in response to the 'thrilling reading' from her 'university son'[167]) brings into excruciating focus the abyss between Saul's "outer life" and his parallel fantasy life.

Laing contends that 'we act not only in terms of our own experience, but of what we think *they* experience, and how we think they think we experience [...] in a logically vertiginous spiral to infinity.'[168] The behaviour of the Olsons confounds this proposition as they never imagine Saul to inhabit an experience other than the one they ascribe to him. For Wersby, however, this vertiginous spiral is revealed as his fantasies evolve. Iris Murdoch maintains that 'a human being hardly ever thinks about other people. He contemplates fantasms which resemble them and which he has decked out for his own purposes.'[169] Although the content of Wersby's hallucinations initially appears to support this contention, his "purposes" are implied through his

---

166 *Tales of the Night*, p. 47
167 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 165
168 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 66

ultimate rejection of the figures who populate his fantasies. His motivation for going in search of Saul is his desire for their displacement by the person they originally displaced. While Wersby' s early fantasies are illuminated by Schumacher's premise that it is more convenient to assume that other people lack 'an inner life as complex, subtle and vulnerable as our own,'[170] he gradually demystifies them and sees them for what they are. *Strawberry Boy* evokes the randomness of the impact that lives exert upon each other by engaging with the tendency of intentions and outcomes to diverge. This disjunction, which is evident in the commune, is also manifested in microcosmic form by Saul's unawareness of the evolution and culmination of Wersby's epiphanic transformation.

Wersby confounds Schumacher's contention that 'we tend to see ourselves primarily in the light of our intentions, which are invisible to others, while we see others mainly in the light of their actions.'[171] For Wersby judges himself purely on his actions, or rather on their absence in the form of his sins of omission. It is this awareness that paralyses his will to compose and catalyses his re-evaluation of his life. Ironically Saul discerns what emerge as Wersby's intentions long before they are evident to Wersby himself. For Saul detects in him, latently, the absence of prejudice (and hence the concomitant lack of "compensatoriness") to which Wersby later aspires and which he finally attains. In confronting "the past" and his collusion in perpetuating the habits it instils, Wersby becomes aware that despite not being guilty of personally looting temples his behaviour to Saul represents the same symbolic desecration. Muller maintains that despite our recognition that 'the luckless men of the past lived by mistaken, even absurd beliefs' we tend to 'forget that the historians

---

[169] Murdoch, I., *Bruno's Dream* (St. Albans: Triad/Panther, 1980), p. 208
[170] *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 96

of the future will point out that we too lived by myths.'[172] Wersby, however, confounds this contention when he sees that the present, of which he is a component, is as brutal and deluded as the past. Foucault demonstrates that the techniques through which power articulates itself have become increasingly hard to identify. Not only have they undergone a synchronic and diachronic transition, emerging as a generative and internalized dynamic, they have also produced a habitualization which obscures the awareness of anything to be demystified. However, by drawing on the interstitial, Wersby sees that his attitudes enact the same process that he perceives metaphorically through the image of African humming-birds being impaled. He challenges the Laingian contention that 'the self which condemns itself is often the last to realize that it is not only the self it condemns that stands in need of forgiveness, but the self that condemns.'[173] For Wersby blames not only the self projected onto his imagined forbears but also his present blaming self to whose accountability the fantasies obliquely testify.

Strawberry Boy explores how the use of slogans functions to aid the construction of the idea of "the enemy." For example, the frequent references to "capitalist oppression" cast "the establishment" as a focus for indignation in the commune. This invocation is portrayed as a prerequisite for the attitudes that sustain the group, both as a reality and an idea. However since by definition slogans are over-simplifications, either the group must ignore the fact that its basis distorts the real or engage with it and thereby risk collapse. Wersby's sceptical avoidance of the group is linked to his awareness of the distortions implicit in language that generate misrepresentations of the real. In this context Foucault argues that the mere fact of

---

[171] *A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 96

[172] Muller, H. J., *Freedom in the Western World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 40-1

'employing words, of using the words of others [...], words that the others understand and accept [...] is in itself a force.'[174] Only when Wersby deconstructs his prejudice, as dramatized in his hallucinated encounters, does he see that he has confused his mistrust of language, agent of the distortion of the real, with a mistrust of "the real" itself. In other words his resentment of the process of distortion has been transferred onto everything the process subsumes. This act of transference is informed by Laing's assertion that 'it is a curious Mephistophelian sophistry to argue that nothing matters because nothing matters or the wrong things matter for so many.'[175] Yet Wersby's determination to free himself from his prejudices springs from the same source as his urge to transcend the limitations of language for, being inherited hatreds, prejudices are clichés in themselves.

Wersby's attempts to break away from playing 'the opening bars of "Edelweiss" [...] to listless couples scattered among [...] deckchairs' have only ever provoked the response:

> "Your music - it does nothing."
>
> "It's not meant to," Wersby would stutter back. "[...] There is very little left outside us. Music is like literature. The language has overflowed. It's become too expressionistic [...]. I'm trying to write music with no external connections or consolations or compensations or egotisms. Mozart never tried to gratify."[176]

Not only does Wersby's rejection of the prospect of his music "doing anything" recall Dickie's attitude to his poetry in *The Cold Country*, the reactions of his unimpressed and uncomprehending audience echo the boredom and bafflement experienced and vocalized by those to whom Dickie reads his poems. Arguably the conscious rejection

---

[173] *Sonnets*, p. 48
[174] Foucault, cited in *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 4
[175] *Sonnets*, p. 57

of egotism paradoxically constitutes the ultimate egotism. However Wersby's aspirations are distinct from those of the Olsons and the inhabitants of the commune as they never expect or anticipate that anyone should conform to his fantasy image of them. 'He wanted his music to be an extension [...] of that white silence of the frosty morning against a black sky when nothing seeped into anything else, trickled or ran or bled [...]. If only he could translate that into music.'[177] Wersby's endeavours are their own reward and through his transformation Dawson explores and challenges the axiomatic disjunction between "responsibility" and "art." His unmoved audiences ask such questions as

> "Do you work with pen or pencil?" [...] But Wersby didn't really mind the empty hall or the lack of interest. He wanted to get back to his work [...]. He had never expected gratification or happiness.
>
> Yet now as he stood here by his window he kept thinking "How happy I am."[178]

Conversely, the lives of the Olsons are contextualized by the Laingian premise that self-alienation is not only produced by but also produces the phenomenon of social alienation. This communal sense of estrangement culminates inevitably in an impulse towards destruction, which represents a denial of the absence of connection.

> Each person, not being himself either to himself or the other, just as the other is not himself to himself or to us, in being another for another, neither recognizes himself in the other, nor the other in himself. Hence, being at least a double absence, haunted by the ghost of his own murdered self [he is] addicted to other persons, and the more addicted, the less satisfied, the more lonely. [179]

---

[176] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 22
[177] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 29-30
[178] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 31
[179] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 62

In such an atmosphere, "love" cannot help but be 'a further alienation, a further act of violence. My need is a need to be needed, my longing a longing to be longed for. I act now to install what I take to be myself in what I take to be the other person's heart.'[180] It therefore seems unlikely that the Olsons could even conceptualize what Wersby feels when he senses the "white silence" transmuting into sound. '"Let it always go on like this. Let it never stop."'[181]

The Olsons' unconscious obsession with averting the realization that they are merely the ghosts of their self- and mutually-murdered selves is sublimated into compulsive accumulation. The "good deeds" they accumulate require the concomitant accumulation of token friends as their recipients and more importantly to witness them. Wersby on the other hand experiences his work as ideally being a 'hewing and exposing rather than inventing and constructing. As though he were excavating rather than creating.'[182] His attitude to music mirrors his exposure, deconstruction and ultimate rejection of the distorted mass of cluttered impressions bred by inherited ideas. Similarly the Olsons' mode of existence, characterized by the frenzied accumulation of episodes that serve as barriers to thought, is mirrored by their perceptions and by the form of the barriers themselves. Instead of "excavating" their behaviour to seek to "expose" their motivations, they "construct" a false reality and "create" a cast of victims whom they see as the beneficiaries of their bounty and whom they induce to confirm and internalize this myth. Whereas the Olsons impose a false reality, Wersby tries to deconstruct the myths whose circulation defines the social world beyond his music. Moreover after meeting Saul he realizes that the inversion of myths perpetuates their hold, and that music which was initially an

---

[180] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 62
[181] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 32

escape from alienation has come to be a mode of alienation in itself. Having confronted and shed his myths, he sees that while "art" is resistant to manipulation into an *agent* of meaning it can forge and function as an interstitial space from within which meaning can be constructed. This position is contextualized by Vivas's contention that it is not through "art" but 'only through the resolution of moral perplexities that a man can discover, *by creating*, what he is.'[183]

Wersby's rejection of "ethical engagement" is shown to be confined to the realm of the theoretical since his creative impulse is paralysed by the collapse of the community around him. As the tenants are decanted and the buildings demolished, he finds that 'the clusters of sound [...] dribbled away too.'[184] Similarly the slaves who plague him obstruct the part of his mind attuned to the transmutation of sound. '*He sharpened his pencil and approached his page, as though his mistress were waiting for him there. He approaches. But she yawns as he is about to penetrate her.*'[185] The choice of metaphor confirms his awareness that other people exist and betrays his thirst for connection, even if this awareness is revealed only through fantasy rather than through how he relates to people in the flesh. It seems unlikely that the characters in the novel who consider themselves "politically engaged" would even notice let alone be deterred by the presence of such a metaphorical yawn. Saul's indifference to Bee, for example, only serves to strengthen her resolve. This reveals that despite her professed "communal" ideals the idea of reciprocity is alien to her. Similarly the Olsons who are desperate to see themselves and to be seen as "involved" are ultimately indifferent to the fate of the world around them whereas Wersby who

---

[182] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 33
[183] Vivas, E., *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life* (Chicago: Regnery-Gateway, 1963), p. 40
[184] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 39
[185] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 126

encloses himself in the solitary "excavation" of sound is paradoxically lodged in the world that he consciously rejects.

> Once he had set words from Simone Weil: [...] "We must be rooted in the absence of a place." But all the same, as he stood there he minded about the streets going. His music was rooted in placelessness, lack of home, defiance of rest and landmarks [...]. And yet suddenly he minded the sight of the cemented-up windows and corrugated iron enclosures and the growing disrelation and placelessness out there.[186]

This "minding" is no affectation, feigned for the benefit of a hypothetical audience; it surfaces impervious to his will. What *is* an affectation, as he becomes aware, is his pride at having discarded 'language, conversation and personality' and at 'having escaped from self and all the projections of self.'[187] 'He needed other people. Only they could bring bone and hardness back to his life.'[188] Without them, as he comes to realize, he will continue to be '*trivial and worthless*,' futile and '*terrorized by slaves.*'[189]

Dostoyevsky identified the 'hardest thing in life' as 'not to believe your own lie.'[190] *Strawberry Boy* implies a correlation between group identification and the characters' belief in the lies that their "false selves" sustain. For the group is defined by its reciprocal reinforcement of the chosen lie and the reassurance that it is in fact the truth. Wersby however dismantles his lie and embraces isolation only to be able to emerge from it again. This endeavour is informed by Canetti's contention that 'excluding the world, so important from time to time, is permissible only if it floods back in with even greater force.'[191] Just as arguably "happiness" is attainable only

---

[186] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 33-4
[187] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 113
[188] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 115
[189] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 127
[190] Dostoyevsky, F., *The Devils*, trans. by D. Magarshack (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 645
[191] *The Human Province*, p. 237

through the detour of its absence, Dawson implies that initial isolation is a prerequisite for genuine engagement with the world. When Wersby finally confronts himself, his 'sickness' is over and he works 'with all the symptoms of inspiration.'[192] Foucault defines liberty as 'the ontological condition of ethics'[193] but in Wersby's case the assertion could also be reversed. For the source of his inspiration is his very desire to free himself from the habits of thought by which he feels constrained.

The process of Wersby's breakdown and breakthrough is intensified by its juxtaposition with Molly's vapid musings: '"I wonder if Tim will drop out of Cambridge and bring us grass to smoke?"'[194] and '"Is it possible to make the revolution without blood running in our streets?"'[195] It is thus that the world of the Olsons is portrayed as reflecting the 'empty psychopath hearts of modern cities.'[196] Their chatter is shown to structurally echo the local paper and the petitions of the Borough Planning Committee. This distortion of language and ultimate loss of meaning that underpin the normalizing drive are symptomatic of a more general threat to diversity, a phenomenon with which Dawson's novels increasingly engage. '"They have no water," residents complain, "and excrement runs freely over the houses." [...] The local residents feared VD, typhus and plague.'[197] '"Is it true that they compel other people to take care of their swarms of excess children? [...] Is it true that half our borough councillors will be black in three years' time?"'[198] Yet since to counter this idiocy with unquestioning inversion results in the tyranny of Bee, it is no less futile than Wersby's strategy of barricading himself away from the world. Dawson examines

---

[192] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 179
[193] *The Final Foucault*, p. 4
[194] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 68
[195] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 157
[196] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 146-7
[197] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 58

how resistance that formulates itself as inversion reinforces the substructural furrows of the underlying paradigm of power. Wersby comes to realize this when he seeks to transcribe into music the revelation that his pose of isolation is a ruse to mask evasion and cowardice.

> When he saw what he had written [...], he saw it was bombast, rhetoric, self-flagellation [...]. Music didn't come from his regenerate heart any more than from his guilt, and it didn't come symmetrically with feeling, but capriciously and from far away, from somewhere that knew nothing of the slave-trade or Hiroshima, Dresden or Auschwitz. [199]

He sees that he has previously written music to which 'you could pass collecting boxes round for famine relief [...]. He had cured himself of art as the street had been cured of people,'[200] the verb throwing oblique light on the myth of benevolence disguising the normalizing drive. Wersby sees that neither ethically nor practically can anything be forced: not the design of the social space; nor the individual's incitement to conform to social myths; nor even music. For, as Canetti argues, 'truth is a sea of grass tossed by the wind; it wants to be felt as motion, drawn in as breath. It is a rock only for the man who neither feels nor breathes it; he can bang his head bloody against it.'[201] Wersby rejects the "rock" of the tyranny of event-related meanings in favour of a "sea of grass" inviolable by circumstance. However Dawson implies that a pre-existing susceptibility to the impact of the horrors of the times is a prerequisite for an interstitial space to be envisaged, existing within and in spite of them.

Saul too is stunned that the world's brutality is intertwined with and yet distinct from the space from which it originates and yet from which its effects can be transcended. His astonishment is intensified by the fact that the ontological essence of

---

[198] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 129
[199] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 179-80

this space can be conveyed in the same world that produces the brutality. At the gallery his haunting by Bee and "Saul Penfold" recedes as he stands before the

> faint gyreing abstracts. They were wordless, schemeless, uninterpretable and therefore unexploitable [...]. There was no investment there [...]. They had cameras out and were calling directions:
>
> "Now cry, black man! Suffer!"
>
> There was plenty to cry about. Hola. Sharpeville [...]. The Soledad Brothers. Only instead, Saul went and stood by the detached [...] spiral abstract, [...] like nothing he recognized.[202]

Fleetingly intact within the interstitial, Saul is struck by a visual variation of what Wersby tries to achieve through the distillation of sound, a transcendence both of "the times" and of time itself. Deleuze and Guattari argue that because music temporally deterritorializes, has no point of origin and 'creates its own co-ordinates,' the musician 'is in the best position to say: not only do I hate memories, but "I hate the faculty of memory."'[203] What Wersby seeks through music and what draws Saul to the abstracts is the intimation of an interstitial space, inviolable by events and by collusion with events existing in time. Saul is mesmerized by the abstracts not only because in reminding him of Wersby's posters they intensify his fantasy of union with him but also because their very existence proposes a different way of seeing. This phenomenon is contextualized by Steiner's contention that abstract art enacts entelechy, 'the pure deployment of potential form.'[204] Broch maintains that 'whatever a man may do, he does it in order to annihilate Time, in order to revoke it, and that revocation is called Space. Even music, which exists only in time and fills time,

---

[200] *Strawberry Boy*, pp. 179-80
[201] *The Human Province*, p. 45
[202] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 133
[203] *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 296
[204] Steiner, G. *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), p. 115

transmutes time into space.'[205] In the light of the premise that all art represents the striving to transcend the perceived linearity of time, music (that "transmutes time into space") paradoxically transcends its own form, contextualizing Pater's claim that all art aspires to the condition of music.[206] Because in *Strawberry Boy* only Saul and Wersby are consciously preoccupied with the brutalizing effects of the social (transmitted and activated as well as undergone by them), it is they who aspire to their transcendence. Reanimating Saul's response to the abstracts, Wersby understands

> that if he ever wrote again it would be a peculiar, reckless, joyful kind of music, a milkman's [...] whistle heard above the music of a public execution, [...] not self-anger, guilt and remorse, but a joyful shout ... He would go on writing, not forgetting the depopulated streets, not forgetting the fire, not forgetting Vietnam. But building on them a Bach-like superstructure of hope and forgiveness and surprise.[207]

While *The Cold Country* also closes with the thought of a shout, in that case it is not "joyful" but a shout of protest, of "anger, guilt and remorse." In *The Cold Country* the shout is not only a reflex but one provoked by frustration and regret, whereas in *Strawberry Boy* it arises out of nowhere except from the inexplicable sense of conviction that somehow calls it forth against the odds.

The "forgiveness" Wersby envisages represents an alternative to the unquestioning inversion exemplified by the attitudes that permeate the commune where opposing "the establishment" consolidates the paradigm and fails to establish the "practices of freedom." Both Saul and Wersby are drawn to the abstract as an interstitial site of potential transcendence of "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" justice, where the source of blame is unlocatable and every act of "taking" perpetuates the

---

205 *The Sleepwalkers*, p. 398
206 Pater, W., "The School of Giorgione," in *The Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 86
207 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 185

process. This phenomenon is informed by Laing's contention that 'whether one moment is taken to be the first or second depends on one's choice of starting point, since the dialectic is always a spiral.'[208]

Wersby proposes "surprise," symbolized by the "whistle" heard above and from within the sound of "a public execution," as an alternative to the execution of the executioner. This is the context in which Arendt argues that 'unpredictability is not lack of foresight, and no engineering management of human affairs will ever be able to eliminate it,'[209] foresight being the epistemological premise of the concept of the unpredictable. To borrow Wersby's example, the whistle's resonance relies on an awareness of the ostensible incongruity of the juxtaposition of unexpected individual liberation and the murderous pre-planned symphony of the metaphorical State. The myth of the preordained is what Wersby wants to challenge in his desire to incorporate the element of "surprise" into the "superstructure" of future compositions. The theme of surprise that underlies the novel is not only dramatized by the not always negative divergence of actions and their outcomes (as seen for example in the impact of the idea of Wersby on Saul's unspoken fantasies) but also by its capacity for defamiliarization. Although the commune is built on sand and carries within itself the seeds of its inevitable failure, it provokes a response in those who survey it, prompting them to question their assumptions. When Wersby goes in search of Saul he feels 'the squatters laughing at him'[210] and even Peter reflects that 'the empty houses depressed him and made him feel guilty.'[211] Although he fails to analyse or act upon this "guilt," Dawson shows how segments of the social can exert an effect on each other in

---

208 *Reason and Violence. A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy 1950-1960*, p. 112
209 Arendt, H., *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 60
210 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 124

unexpected ways. Had the commune dwellers engaged with the fact that the normalizing social discourse had infiltrated their attitudes, the commune might have had a chance of "success." The annihilation of "self" and the suspension of time that strike Saul in front of the abstracts and that Wersby tries to activate through music spring from the same sense of randomness that marks the experience of Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*. The sense of spontaneity challenges the tyranny of the totalitarian temporal mode of continuity. It is this phenomenon of "surprise" that the normalizing drive, as manifested in the world of the Olsons, the world of the commune, the orchestrations of the Borough Planning Committee and the metaphor of the public execution, seeks to abolish.

Dawson highlights the contrast between Saul and Wersby's attitudes and those of Peter and Molly in her juxtaposition of Saul and Wersby's wordless sense of wonder with the Olsons's relentless chatter at their "gatherings." ""How do you like our abstract?" Mr Olson interrupted the mirth as he saw his wife's latest investment, a shy young man from Malawi [...]. "Does it say anything to you?""[212] His proprietorial attitude to the painting and his anticipation of the response it might provoke is a replication of Molly's approach to the "shy young man from Malawi." Everything and everyone is seen as an "investment," as identity validation and as a launching pad for chatter. Ironically, however, their compulsive appropriation and obsession with control blinds them to the mysterious reality of that which they appropriate (whether an abstract or an African). The impulse towards "investment," one of the novel's defining themes, is encapsulated by contrast in Saul's fleeting sense of liberation, for the abstracts mesmerize him precisely because of the lack of "investment there." Thus

---

[211] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 69
[212] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 154

they negate the influence of Bee who, resentful that her "investment" in him seems not to be acquiring any interest, changes her approach to that of revenge. Laing calls this process of one person investing in another a tactic of '*enforced debt.*'[213] When the repayments prove unenforceable Bee imposes control by other means since both she and the Olsons, as representatives of the normalizing drive, are motivated by the impulse to eliminate surprise..

Wersby, unlike Bee and the Olsons, is attuned to the liberatory potential latent in the fantasy abdication of control. He sees that he cannot redress injustices through music; he can only open the lids of his mind and wait 'for the tide to turn and come, waiting like an insomniac for sleep, quietly, not tempting, not stealing or angry, but turning his back as the gratuitous flows back.'[214] 'The more impossible it became - this persistent and irrational joy - the louder and more insistent. The further away the music was from place and action and race and history, the more openly insolent it grew.'[215]

"Hope," the final element of Wersby's superstructure, represents precisely this defiance of the impossible, and the fact that he records it, preserving it for others, challenges his veneer of misanthropy. In the light of Canetti's contention that 'everything one *records* contains a grain of hope, no matter how deeply it may come from despair,'[216] the form of Wersby's message reinforces its content by symbolizing the urge to transcend isolation. Steiner, too, aligns 'hope' with communication, defining "hoping" as a 'speech act, inwardly or outwardly communicative, which

---

213 *The Politics of Experience*, p. 76
214 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 180
215 *Strawberry Boy*, p. 184
216 *The Human Province*, p. 50

presumes a listener, be it the self.'[217] He contends that since 'our true familiars are the 'selves' or phantom auditors and respondents to whom we address the lexical-grammatical-semantic currents of silent speech,' the 'ontological *aloneness* of the creative moment' is 'populous.'[218] This interpretation not only intensifies the dynamic between Wersby's composition and Saul's response, it anticipates the symbolic impact of the composition as explored in Dawson's next novel, *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*.

Dawson distinguishes Wersby from the inhabitants of the commune by their divergent interpretations of the concepts of hope and of change. Whereas the commune dwellers assume that an "inner transformation" will result automatically from their change of location, Wersby examines his own attitudes before adjusting them (and acting on this adjustment), always bearing in mind that what ultimately matters most is the impact of these attitudes on others. In other words while Wersby takes "self-analysis" as a starting point for engaging with the world, the inhabitants of the commune alter the territory but fail to address their internalization of the normalizing paradigm they consciously reject. Therefore their proposed recodifications merely consolidate the normalizing drive. In his study of the phenomenon of crowds, Le Bon encapsulates this tendency by citing the case of the Dostoyevskian Nihilist who, having been illumined by 'the light of reason,' promptly 'broke the images of divinities and saints [...], extinguished the candles, and without losing a moment, replaced the destroyed objects by the works of atheistic philosophers [...], after which he piously relighted the candles.'[219] In the commune the hope of

---

[217] *Grammars of Creation*, p. 6

[218] *Grammars of Creation*, p. 71

[219] Le Bon, G., *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* (Marietta, Georgia: Larlin Corporation, 1982), p. 64

resistance is dashed because the change of location, a valid point of departure, is mistaken for a final and conclusive victory.

Strawberry Boy develops the theme of individual engagement anticipated in *The Cold Country* by lifting it from the level of introspection and presenting the social subject as potentially more than a transmission wire of normalizing power. Wersby's approach to the way he lives mirrors his conception of his work which he sees as a process of "excavation" and of "letting the gratuitous flow back." Having decided to transform his attitudes, instead of adopting a *new* set of myths he tries to demystify the old ones to guard against their persistent effects and to stop them re-establishing themselves. This approach is contextualized by Foucault's contention that a knowledge of 'stone-cutting' is a prerequisite for 'a liking for architecture.'[220] Conversely the inhabitants of the commune are so fixated on the theoretical "architecture" of their enterprise that they neglect its micropolitical "stone-cutting" aspect. Because they themselves are the stones they neglect to cut, the architecture they construct becomes a replication of the old. This is the context of the Foucauldian distinction between 'playing *with* the structure - transforming and transfiguring its limits' and 'playing inside the structure.'[221] Unlike the commune dwellers who operate within the orbit of the existing structure, Wersby tries to "play with" the structure itself, an enterprise requiring an understanding of the structure's origins and modes of maintenance. He tries to transcend and then to reinhabit himself in the hope that this process of departure and return will enable him to see himself more clearly.

Hadot, a Foucauldian critic, cites Friedmann's recommendation that one should

---

[220] Foucault, M., "Docile Bodies," in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 183

[221] quoted in Miller, J., *The Passions of Michel Foucault* (London: Flamingo, HarperCollins, 1994), p. 352

> at least for a moment leave ordinary time behind [...]. This inner effort is necessary, this ambition, just. Many are those who are entirely absorbed in militant politics, in the preparation for the social revolution. Rare, very rare, are those who, in order to prepare for the revolution, wish to become worthy of it.[222]

Although Wersby thinks in terms of personal rather than "social" revolution, he rejects the inherited assumptions that frustrate all revolutions at their inception. It is thus that he embodies hope by forging a belief in the existence of others with the potential to influence his conduct. The Nietzschean alignment of the immersion in music with the process of immersion in love anticipates Iris Murdoch's definition of love as the extremely difficult realization that someone other than oneself exists. The emergence of the milkman's whistle in Wersby's composition is illuminated by Nietzsche's contention that

> first one has to learn to hear a figure or a melody at all, to detect and distinguish it, to isolate it and delimit it as a separate life. Then it requires some exertion and goodwill to tolerate it despite its strangeness, to be patient with its experience and expression, and kindhearted about its oddity. Finally there comes a moment when we are used to it, when we wait for it, when we sense we should miss it if it were not there.[223]

In other words, music, like love, has to be learned.

At the end of *Strawberry Boy*, although Wersby glimpses the hope of "salvation," Saul like Zay in *The Cold Country* is defeated by the internalization of normalizing power. When his cousin gives him a suit to wear to court, he can only think of the small brown fish, the defining image of the novel. Just as the commune proves no less constraining than the world of the Olsons, his attempts at a snarl prove no less ineffectual than his smile. In each case inversion simply reinforces the pattern.

---

[222] Friedmann, G, cited in Hadot, P., "Forms of Life and Forms of Discourse in Ancient Philosophy," in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, p. 224

> Over a period of half a million years this small creature had evolved not a shark's teeth or a dolphin's speed or a sac of poisoned ink but only a flirting mimic camouflage. Nature preserved the part by immunizing it against the whole. He only had power to ape the better-established species of the universe. Perhaps someone would tattoo an ingratiating mask smile on the backs of his hands so that when he walked down the street he would only have to lift them to his face in order to pass.[224]

Saul's final thoughts reanimate the theme that while power's self-deification incites identification as much as worship, this identification tends not to be authentic. For his efforts to "pass" are undertaken with resignation rather than conviction.

Nonetheless, although characteristically unresolved, the ending of *Strawberry Boy* is more tentatively hopeful than that of *The Cold Country* published the previous decade. This is not only because Zay's life ends while Saul's remains in the balance but also because Wersby's change of heart has stronger foundations than Dickie's less informed transformation. Saul's connection with Wersby recalls that of Septimus Smith with Mrs. Dalloway in Woolf's eponymous novel. Each relationship is characterized by the psychic reabsorption of what has been excluded, inaugurating a change in the perceptions of the absorber, but also paradoxically a fading from view of the absorbed. Another factor contributing to the tentative optimism of *Strawberry Boy* is the intimation of spaces within the social where the structure can be fleetingly suspended and therefore potentially subverted. Thus Dawson implies that since the normalizing drive derives from the structure, its effects can be interstitially transcended, suggesting intimations of a restructured subject who can survive in more than a purely physical sense. Whereas *The Cold Country* ends with Dickie, bereft in the wake of his complicity in Zay's suicide, grasping at the thought of 'a banner,' 'a

---

[223] Nietzsche, F., *The Science of Joy*, quoted in Chamberlain, L., *Nietzsche in Turin* (London: Quartet Books, 1997), pp. 148-9

[224] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 164

shout' and 'a slogan,'[225] *Strawberry Boy* implies that banners, shouts and slogans, metaphorical or otherwise, are pointless unless they are the products of, rather than merely the substitutes for, altered habits of mind.

Goethe's assertion that "in the beginning is the deed" neglects to engage with the motivating impulse of the deed. Had Wersby gone in search of Saul simply because the benefits of his rent outweighed his flat's imagined invasion by African tribes bearing jugs of dog-fat, the "happy whistle" would have been a sigh of cynicism. The element of surprise, sublimated into music, has its source in his life which at the same time is encapsulated by the composition. Therefore Foucault's claim 'I write precisely because I don't know yet what to think about a subject that attracts my interest. In so doing the book transforms me'[226] is also applicable to Wersby. Although Wersby dramatizes *Strawberry Boy*'s prolegomenon '...The unconscious does not betray... He walks secure through life... But we who are part of a Tradition...,'[227] his resistance to the betrayal of his unconscious enables him to demystify the effects of the tradition by which its integrity is threatened.

Wersby combines elements of each of Dawson's previous protagonists. Like Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* he inhabits a world of astonishment distinct from the chatter and brutality around him, but like Dickie in *The Cold Country* he is mobilized by the impulse to act on his insights and draw on them to influence his life. Kundera defines 'the novelist' as neither a 'historian' nor a 'prophet,' but instead as an 'explorer of existence.'[228] Dawson's first three novels were published in the first half of the

---

225 *The Cold Country*, p. 153
226 *Remarks on Marx*, p. 27
227 Jan Myrdal, *The Confession of a Disloyal European* (quoted by Noam Chomsky in the *Cambridge Review*, 19 February 1971)
228 *The Art of the Novel*, p. 44

'sixties and over a decade elapsed between *The Cold Country*'s publication and that of *Strawberry Boy*. The evolution of her fiction is characterized by a shift from the mono-perspective to the presentation of a web of lives whose overlap invites a deeper exploration of the myriad effects of the normalizing drive and the potential for their interstitial resistance. Both Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* and Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* feel isolated from everyone around them, Joanna by the gauze of her consciousness and Josephine by the way this gauze combines with the predicament it produces. Although *The Cold Country* introduces a secondary character, Zay, in relation to whom the character of Dickie is shown to develop, the structures represented by the novel's other characters are largely presented through their impact on the protagonist. *Strawberry Boy* on the other hand engages with a wider range of manifestations of the normalizing drive, which are shown to evolve independently and synchronically but also to overlap, combine and intersect. These mutually consolidating micro-dialects of the meta-discourse of the social (the world of the Olsons, the atmosphere of the commune and the encroachment of "Urban Planning") are all sites of resonance for the normalizing power that activates them. In other words, it is as if these multiple sites of resonance are the playthings of the breath of the wind from which can be inferred the nature of the wind itself. The Foucauldian recommendation that an ascending analysis best reveals the tendencies of power informs the world of *Strawberry Boy* where the discourse of the status quo, activated by power, can be inferred from the grammatical consistencies between the different dialects through which it articulates itself.

The fantasy alliance between Saul (the catalyst) and Wersby is the interstitial space of the novel where Dawson explores the complex dynamic between "art" and

"living in the world." The structure of the novel's "plot" thus explores and develops its themes, linking content and form. The italicized fantasies of these two characters constitute an interstitial site where the impact of the normalizing drive, which underlies and gives impetus to the plot, can be questioned and potentially transcended. This represents a significant departure and reflects the development of Dawson's concerns. While the form through which the content is conveyed exists on the same continuum as the content itself, it also represents a vantage point from which the whole continuum and its interlocking segments can be demystified and deconstructed. Foucault believed that 'the work is more than the work, the subject who is writing is part of the work.'[229] Paradoxically, the more diffuse the authorial voice and the less concentrated in a single protagonist (as in *The Ha-Ha* and *Fowler's Snare*), the more distinctive and present it seems, as if, God-like, its absence intensifies its potency as an idea.

---

229 Charles Raus, "An Interview with Michel Foucault," in *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Michel Foucault*, trans. by C. Raus (London: The Athlone Press, 1986), p. 184

A Field Of Scarlet Poppies

The Elusiveness Of "Inner Space"

In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* events in the wider world like the war in Vietnam and the failure of C.N.D. not only exacerbate Will's cumulative breakdown but also function as scapegoats for a crisis attributable to the deadlock of his marriage and his preoccupation with the loss of youth. The impasse of Will and Thelma's marriage, mirrored by the sense of psychic paralysis engendered by the presence of the Bomb, reflects and is reflected by the loss of his political commitment. Set against the collusive compliance which he sees as defining the response to global events is his thirst for authentic human exchange, symbolized by his longing to interpret Wersby's composition and activate and assimilate its superstructural fusion of hope and forgiveness and surprise. Only when a self-willed engagement with the present has displaced his obsession with attaining "the Absolute," symbolized by visions of his father's suicide, can he sublimate the coincidental from the essential, the sublime from the pedestrian, the unforeseeable from the predictable and the sound of Wersby's milkman's whistle from the noise of the public execution. The struggles of the musical quartet to forge an interstitial space from which to transcend the normalizing drive reanimate Wersby's spirit and dramatize the synergy of the unpredictable mutual impact of individual lives.

Will And Thelma: Collusive Deadlock

A Field of Scarlet Poppies (1979) develops the concerns underlying *Strawberry Boy* and contextualizes them through a fusion of the themes of the earlier novels. The evolution of Dawson's fiction, from portraying the intensity of a largely self-referential inner world to wider and more complex configurations of struggle, culminates in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* in an interplay of resonances of all the resulting perspectives already explored. Metaphysical anguish is shown to be both compounded by and projected onto the tensions between engagement with the ethical and engagement with the wider social world. The characters exert a range of influences on each other, so that instead of simply functioning to represent structures that threaten the protagonist's existential autonomy, they are portrayed as the vehicles of potential salvation as well as those of ontological threat. Not only does this widening circle of characters highlight the friction between the life of the subject and that of the community, the impact of different characters on each other's actual and fantasy lives reveals a shift in moral focus to the way that social entities can shape each other's experience. Having progressed from the presentation of an isolated protagonist under threat to an exploration of the mutually destructive dynamic of fellow victims, the emphasis of Dawson's fiction moves towards the breakthrough of characters who forge an experience of each other. It is however significant that the manifestations in which these characters are interpreted by others are not necessarily those in which they would recognize themselves.

Strawberry Boy closes with Wersby's epiphany that in order to be attainable the integration of art and engagement must be both subtle and informed. While the evolution of this realization unfolds unbeknown to anyone else, he sublimates its

essence into music which outlasts him. Wersby is the force behind *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* and despite the fact that he 'did himself in'[1] his music is what binds the quartet of disparate characters whose search for meaning constitutes an interstitial act of resistance in an ever more brutalizing world.

Will is the protagonist, referred to obliquely in *Strawberry Boy* as the cellist whom Wersby once had loved and who called his music 'high-pitched titters' before leaving him for the conductor 'who had fed him this thought.'[2] Thus while *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* could arguably be understood as a sequel, it would be more accurate to read it as a device for developing the themes of the previous novel. Dawson's earlier fiction whose focus is the contextual intelligibility of "breakdown" shows the catastrophic results when group ideologies seek to constrain and redefine a subject's untranscribable inner life. *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* elucidates this ontological process but also reveals how those who resist it can inspire those who follow them to aspire to its transcendence.

Will who in *Strawberry Boy* is not only nameless but so peripheral as to be glimpsed only fleetingly as a snide figure devoid of understanding moves centre stage in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* where he becomes the central site where a range of forces converge and in whom Wersby's spirit functions both as an irritant and a mobilizing force. So Wersby at whom he sneered in his previous incarnation becomes the focus of his urge for transcendence, just as in *Strawberry Boy* it was Saul, or the phantom he was imagined to embody, who precipitated Wersby's transformation. Dawson's shift in perspective thus reinforces the impact of one life on another, even though this impact can take years to be assimilated and felt. This phenomenon, which

---

[1] Dawson, J., *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* (London: Quartet Books, 1979), p. 2
[2] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 112

underlines the unknowability of the influence we unconsciously exert on one another, illuminates the importance of the choice we make of whether or not to aspire to an ethical life. Wersby's preoccupation with truth, which made him wary in *Strawberry Boy* of using his music as a vehicle for 'rhetoric' or 'self-flagellation,'[3] is what Will now holds before him to give him inspiration in a world of proliferating slogans and clichés where purpose and meaning appear to have slipped from his grasp. So while Dawson's earlier novels present social subjects who are locked in mutual ontological destruction, *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* redresses the balance by demonstrating how those who resist semantic distortion are psychically invoked by those whose lives they have touched, to help them resist the impulse to surrender. As Will muses at the end of the novel, even if the longed for tide never takes him (even the metaphor is Wersby's), perhaps 'someone much better than [him] would take over where [he] had left off, someone who could assimilate the world of Vietnam and electronic, computerised warfare and nuclear accidents'[4] and all the other horrors of the times.

Will fuses elements of Dawson's previous characters, both the "sympathetic" and the less sympathetic. By embodying aspects of characters previously presented as antagonistic to the protagonist's autonomy he offers insights into the tensions between his inner and outer lives, rendering his destructive words and actions intelligible. This development is a reverberation, in the realm of the evolution of the perspective of Dawson's fiction, of what Wersby longed to convey through his music - a transcendent 'superstructure of hope and forgiveness and surprise.'[5] These cross-currents and the second person narration distinguish Dawson's fifth novel from its predecessors. Will's self-estrangement is intensified by this structural device, as his

---

[3] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 179
[4] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 199

music is blocked by a sense of "disconnectedness" from the present and from his experience of the present. The mode of narration thus foregrounds the content it explores. Will's apathy fuses the interlocking segments and strands of his world, where he feels that he merely observes himself and fails to inhabit his life. His creative impasse, the deadlock of his marriage, the war in Vietnam and the presence of the Bomb dramatize on different levels his sensation of being at the mercy of events. This paralysis is juxtaposed to vertiginous effect with the elation of discovery he perceives as confined to the past - the discovery of music, the experience of Wersby and the sense of fellowship embodied by C.N.D.. The source of this euphoria reformulates the feelings evoked by the flying bombs that fell in the Second World War. However this sense of engagement is displaced by the present, whose deadlock is symbolized by the presence of the Bomb.

R. D. Laing, whose perspective informs Dawson's fiction, highlights the way in which the discourse of the *status quo* insinuates itself into individual experience and thus exerts an effect on individual attitudes. Will in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* shares the preoccupations of the Laingian subject in *The Politics of the Family* whose experience is defined by 'the cold war, the balance of terror, techniques of deterrence or détente, the impossibility of divorce, the need for coexistence, the apparent impossibility of coexistence.'[6] Will and Thelma are locked in a mutually suffocating marriage, which examines from a new vantage point aspects of Dawson's previous explorations of deadlock, which can only be resisted or transcended interstitially.

The focus of her previous novels was the tendency of the normalizing drive to obstruct dissent by pre-emptively invalidating those whose attitudes failed to reflect

---

[5] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 185
[6] *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays*, p. 8

the internalized *status quo*. To a degree this is still the case in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, especially as manifested in the semantic contortions employed to belittle C.N.D.. However in Dawson's fifth novel these operations are shown to be so internalized that applications of normalizing power are no longer monopolized by those who represent the *status quo*. *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* explores the systematic habitualization to this dynamic, even when two characters are so similarly positioned in the network of power that this is what perpetuates the deadlock of their union. The implications of a Laingian reading of schizophrenogenesis complement Foucault's theories of power to contextualize and deconstruct the tensions in Will and Thelma's marriage. "Anti-psychiatric" interpretations of breakdown not only propose the contextual intelligibility of people's tendency to drive each other mad but locate these ostensibly mystifying manœuvres within Foucauldian analyses of power. As Fromm argues, 'to understand the dynamics of the social process we must understand the dynamics of the psychological processes operating within the individual, just as to understand the individual we must see him in the context of the culture which moulds him.'[7]

The Laingian contention that 'being "the victim" may also be an act of collusion'[8] informs Thelma's tendency not only to comply with but also to establish and then to consolidate her rôle as absorber of the blame. Her drinking becomes a convenient scapegoat for Will's creative drought, and the collusion gathers momentum as each reinforces the other. Thelma's ostensibly plaintive but in fact strangely gleeful lament, '"You should have married a professional woman like Nancy instead of an inarticulate one who was trained for nothing but making herself pleasing

---

[7] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. ix
[8] *Self and Others*, p. 111

to men and not even succeeding at that"'[9] constructs rather than replicates the circulating flow of contempt by which their marriage is defined. Will responds to her theme with an aptitude sadly absent from his playing of the cello. '"I thought that when we got married ours would be an equal partnership, but now I have an invalid to nurse, and that is not equality."'[10] Max Frisch illuminates the origin and outcome of such resentment by evoking the phenomenon where

> because our love has come to an end, because its power is expended, that person is finished for us [...]. "You are not," says he or she who has been disappointed, "what I took you for." And what was that? For a mystery - which is after all what a human being is - for an exciting puzzle of which one has become tired. And so one creates for oneself an image. This is the loveless act, the betrayal.[11]

Will feels cheated by the fates when in fact he simply made a choice which he now considers ill-advised and in whose aftermath Wersby's message of "hope, forgiveness and surprise" seems absent. His reduction of Thelma to the image of a burden, a metaphor with which she readily colludes, both scapegoats and becomes a scapegoat for their despair at the developments within their social horizons which C.N.D. has failed to stop in their tracks. Will's concurrence that his crisis has been caused by Thelma's drinking is partly a conscious strategy and partly a refrain that surfaces impervious to his will.

> "I wonder" you thought, "if Thelma stopped drinking... if Thelma were happy again... if Thelma became once more the person I loved when I first met her during C.N.D.... I wonder if I no longer had the role of nurse... [...]. I wonder if my own problem would grow larger."[12]

This insight undermines the psychoanalytic premise that people tend to be unaware of what motivates the cover stories they concoct to justify and vindicate their lives.

---

[9] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 6
[10] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 14
[11] Frisch, M., *Sketchbook, 1946-1949*, trans. by Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 17

Indeed, although ostensibly desired, Thelma's sober interludes deprive Will of excuses and hence disrupt the bedrock of their marriage. 'She had not said "If you get my meaning" or "If you see my drift" once so far. She sat there poised and attractive and laughing as though to dissociate herself from you.'[13] To Will, she seems 'implacable in her revenge: "I'm not going to drink anymore. I need to be clear-headed and sober to get you out of this slough of despond."'[14] Trapped as they are in a sado-masochistic double-bind, for one to exhibit intimations of "coping" is mutually interpreted as signifying the other's ineptitude. As with the nuclear bomb, tactics ostensibly designed to avert disaster have come to embody a threat surpassing the constructed threat against which they purport to be a defence.

Thelma's attitude is illuminated by the Nietzschean "bad conscience" analysed by Laing where self-blame, as Deleuze puts it, 'reaches the summit of its contagious power, by changing direction. It cries "it is my fault, it is my fault" until the whole world takes up this dreary refrain.'[15] This tendency is explored in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* when Will contracts the compulsion to monopolize, or appear to be monopolizing, the blame. '"I wish I were a warm loving man [...]. There must be some men who would be authentically sympathetic. Men who are stable enough and well-enough founded in themselves to give you loving support when you have these cravings and feelings of loneliness."'[16] Thelma's veneer of self-condemnation veils the insinuation that her husband's intellect alienates him even from himself. In the same way, his self-deprecating pose masks the implication, conveyed by his choice of

---

[12] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 15
[13] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 22
[14] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 35
[15] Deleuze, G., *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), p. 132
[16] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 14

the word 'craving,' that Thelma's "needs" are simply the whims of appetite. However the fact that she can withhold at will her rôle as invalid and burden signifies a latent, if seldom exercised, capacity for turning the tables, symptomatic of the potential negotiation that distinguishes power relations from operations of force. This potential is further exposed when, to Will's malicious throwaway remark, '"I saved you from spinsterhood and the typing pool,"' he knows that she 'could have replied: "And I saved you from homosexuality when you were living with John Wersby [...]." She could have said it but she didn't.'[17] This retaliatory potential, held in abeyance but always a threat, evokes the threat of the bomb in whose oppressive metaphorical shadow the lives of the characters unfold.

Edward Thompson contends that in the Cold War, when superpowers 'have been locked for thirty years in the postures of military confrontation,' what originated 'in reaction'[18] soon becomes direction. This observation is equally applicable to Will and Thelma's marriage in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, where what began as self-defence against a real or imagined threat is now enshrined as habit. For example, Thelma's jibes, initially attempts at inciting Will to prove her wrong, have come to function as their own reward. When he echoes Wersby and asks rhetorically, with reference to Vietnam, '"How can I take sides with people who would put me to silence if they were in power here?"' her snide retort '"It sounds as if you are in silence already"'[19] contradicts her purported aim of trying to coax him out of his "slough of despond." The conceptual triumph of the Bomb functions as a cause of the failure of relationships and also as a scapegoat for this failure, as implied when Will

---

17 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 13

18 Thompson, E., "Notes on Exterminism, The Last Stage of Civilization," in New Left Review, *Exterminism and Cold War* (London: Verso Editions & N. L. R., 1982), p. 15

19 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 154

invokes it to spuriously justify his inertia. Furthermore Dawson portrays relationships as reflecting the sense of deadlock where metaphorically neither partner dares to make a move. This phenomenon is also explored in Zamyatin's *We* where the effects of the world as war zone and conformity-inducing factory infiltrate those enmeshed in it and who concomitantly activate, consolidate and construct it. 'The idea of stirring frightens me: what will I turn into? And it seems to me that everybody is just as afraid of the least motion as I am [...]. What will happen tomorrow? What will I turn into tomorrow?'[20] This circularity gathers momentum in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* and intensifies the hostility that underlies Will and Thelma's marriage, a dynamic illuminated by the observation of the protagonist of Eco's *In the Name of the Rose*. '"When your true enemies are too strong, you have to choose weaker enemies"' since '"only the powerful seem to know with great clarity who their true enemies are."'[21] Over time Dawson's novels increasingly reject the condemnatory tone in favour of exploring how social subjects come to persecute others, not through any sadistic impulse but because they fail to realize the degree to which these elusive "enemies" are themselves.

Nietzsche argues that the only moral imperative is by fair means or foul to 'attain satisfaction with himself,' for whoever fails to achieve this goal 'is continually ready for revenge; and we others will be his victims, if only by having to endure his ugly sight.'[22] This contention informs *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* where the frustration of Will and Thelma at the elusiveness of such peace of mind is conveyed through an exchange of jibes that perpetuates the deadlock. Since Thelma wants to be married to

---

[20] Zamyatin, Y., *We*, trans. by Bernard Guilbert Guerney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p. 146
[21] Eco, U., *In the Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1984), p. 192
[22] Nietzsche, F., *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 233

a man she can admire while Will longs only for an end to his inner paralysis, Thelma's vengeance tends to be more brutal since she attributes her frustration to his own. Doubly thwarted by the failure of C.N.D. (which Will also blames for his artistic drought) and by her husband's failure to provide her with vicarious satisfaction by "succeeding" musically, her tactics are more ruthless and thus her "sight" more "ugly." This is how Dawson dramatizes the paradoxical interplay of victimhood and aggression, a dynamic inter-textually reinforced by the relationship between *Strawberry Boy* and *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. Operations of power are not only seldom what they seem within specific relationships but each individual is situated differently within the network of power between one relationship and the next. Thelma embodies the same symbolic function that the Will of the past fulfilled for Wersby, even to the point where his remembered refrain "'You drag me down"'[23] has become Thelma's mantra that encapsulates their marriage. Moreover his mockery of her desire for sociability echoes Wersby's earlier rejection of his own which prompted the same retorts of self-defence that Thelma now repeatedly invokes. He remembers Wersby's dismissal of social chatter as a phenomenon 'as incomprehensible as an opera in a foreign language, as meaningless as its synopsis and its characters mouthing animatedly at completely meaningless phrases and responding with equal excitement to these unknowns.'[24] By a process of delayed osmosis, the position that he once so vehemently opposed has gradually come to underlie his present attitudes. As he interprets it, his punishment for having failed to heed Wersby's warnings is that Thelma now enrages him as his past self infuriated Wersby. Here, however, projection is evident as Wersby scapegoated no one and, although unbeknown to Will,

---

[23] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 113
[24] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 112

transcended the need for scapegoats. Having achieved through private ordeals what Cioran calls 'the histrionics of detachment,'[25] he disavowed the need for an external locus of blame. In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* Will is unaware that what he envies in Wersby is his remembered refusal to play the kinds of games in which he now finds himself enmeshed. However to perceive himself as a reanimation of Wersby he exaggerates the triviality of his past self in order to magnify his wife's deficiencies.

His allegation that her speeches about non-alignment politics in the thirties have become her 'cards of identity'[26] echoes his recollection of Wersby's scepticism with regard to political engagement. Furthermore Thelma's retort '"George never treats his pupils with such contempt. Perhaps that's why you don't have all that many pupils"'[27] replicates his past self's remembered derision of Wersby. Moreover Thelma's undermining of Will's interpretation of the composition, '"Julius calls your playing low-pitched tittering in a corner,"'[28] uncannily echoes in both form and content the way in which the past Will discredited Wersby's music. Not only did he quote (or allegedly quote) the conductor for whom he later left Wersby as having called his music "high-pitched titters," he also invoked the cowardly device of attributing the insult to a third party, to pre-empt retaliation and exacerbate existing paranoia. Thelma's use of the word "titter" deliberately implies her perception of Will as someone smug and ethically bereft who holds himself aloof from the political engagement on which their relationship was based. It is with such banter that Will and

---

[25] *A Short History of Decay*, p. 104
[26] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 9
[27] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 33
[28] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 34

Thelma mask the lie of their marriage, which has come to embody what Bernhard describes as 'a condition of double despair' and 'double exile.'[29]

Annery, the "successful" conductor for whom Will rejected Wersby, and the origin (or alleged origin) of the "titters" insult, is now invoked by Thelma to taunt Will by implication with his own lack of public recognition. Her ostensibly "supportive" but in fact transparently belittling remark, '"Annery might be able to get you into a really good orchestra again,"'[30] encapsulates the workings of power in the guise of the normalizing drive. Thelma's premise of the presumed desirability of success, with its connotations of appeal to the majority, could potentially have activated resistance. Had Will been on the verge of succumbing to its allure, the fact that Thelma invokes it might have strengthened his resolve to reject it, a phenomenon illuminating the unpredictable interplay of the symbiotic currents of resistance and normalizing power.

Ironically Will's irritation with Thelma's habits has grown to be a habit in itself. Her jarring mannerisms and linguistic idiosyncrasies deafen him to what they seek to convey. One of her first pronouncements articulates his own concerns and those of the novel: '"I want to grasp things of eternal value [...]. There is so much chaos and misery in the world. The Bomb. Vietnam. Do you get my meaning? Art seems to lift emotion out of squalor and into beauty if you see my drift."'[31] However when filtered through her characteristic mode of self-expression, it merely succeeds in exasperating him. It seems to Will that by dint of being articulated, particularly by Thelma, these concerns are implicitly trivialized and thus that he is by extension

---

[29] Bernhard, T., *The Lime Works*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 162

[30] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 167

[31] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 3

trivialized himself. This gnawing resentment echoes and is echoed by the implied contempt in Thelma's sneer '"It's all right, Julius [...]. Will is gradually becoming disenchanted with music. Beethoven bores him. Schoenberg he curses."'[32] Each jealously guards the uncorrupted concept of music, insinuating that the other lacks the capacity to experience all it can potentially express and activate, a tendency also evident in their ongoing rivalry over which of them is the more attuned to the horrors defining the times. For example Will's scorn is palpable in his observation that 'she would stagger in talking about Guernica or Hiroshima or the bombing of Hanoi.'[33] This mutual disdain, product of their shared frustration, manifests itself as resentment that someone they have grown to despise could dwell on the same concerns, a resentment that can only be assuaged by the assumption that the other is unable to appreciate the true nature of the concerns in question.

This situation is illuminated by the Foucauldian contention that while everyone's moves are dictated by power, a multitude of factors affect the location of each component of the network. A shift in rôles can never take the form of a simple substitution precisely because of how these factors vary from one situation to the next. For example, the source of tension in Will's alliance with Wersby seems to have been his confusion about the distinction between wanting to be *with* him and wanting to actually *be* him, a tension absent from his equally fraught relationship with Thelma. Will however overplays the significance of the pattern for while Thelma wants to be validated through deflected glory the Will of the past was fuelled by personal envy. Furthermore, Wersby composed, while Will interprets the composition, a distinction mirrored in his current self-estrangement which he feels can only be countered by the

---

[32] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 21
[33] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 10

mediation of a phantom Wersby for whom he can be the ventriloquist and oblique interpreter. His scapegoating of Thelma, with which she colludes in order to sustain the myth that she is in control of the perpetual deferral of this deflected glory, represents a deviation from the established pattern. In other words Will is deluding himself by directly transposing his remembered relationship with Wersby onto his present one with Thelma. For people in a similar "relationship position" within the nexus of power need not necessarily share an *absolute* position. Dawson's evocation of Will's revulsion in the face of Thelma's "femaleness" resonates on many different levels. Not only is her gender a perpetual reminder of his cowardice in opting for convention, it also serves as a site of projection for his own sense of shame and self-disgust. 'She was pumping your cello up until it became a great pair of hips caging a huge uterus waiting for impregnation. The F-holes suddenly held ovaries bursting out seed.'[34] 'Her nipples were like two corks bursting out of bottles.'[35] 'You didn't want her to touch you.'[36] The fact that the choice of metaphors is dictated by the cultural discourse rather than specific personality attributes is confirmed by the fact that in *Strawberry Boy* Saul projects a similar revulsion onto Ruth. "Race," "gender" and "sexuality," oft-cited factors in the construction of identity, influence a social subject's position in the network of power. However race and gender, usually self-evident, are in this sense distinct from sexuality which, being neither fixed nor physically apparent, can more easily be projected and denied. Gender is also distinct from race in that, given conventions of sexual allegiance, the alliances it establishes generate a greater degree of collusion. Thus while Saul in *Strawberry Boy* defines his

---

[34] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 36
[35] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 167
[36] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 158

identity in terms of having to 'lug round'[37] a huge musical instrument which he is unable to play, Thelma in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* perceives herself as 'a tiresome appendage like a suitcase you've got to lug around.'[38] Saul, male but black, is reduced to a token oddity, undermined by audience expectations. Despite being a dumping ground for spurious formulations of benevolent liberality, he maintains a certain distance from his self-estrangement as he hauls around his perceived identity for the benefit of spectators who only hear the music they expect. Thelma, on the other hand, white but female, is not only at the mercy of the pressures of "society," but also specifically oppressed by Will. Thus she can identify a locus of constraint in the husband who not only tries to control her every move but who openly resents doing so.

Unlike Dawson's earlier novels, *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* blurs the distinction between aggressor and victim (oppressor and oppressed) as the overlapping strands of the network of power are shown to be more tangled than they initially appear, not only within and between relationships but also in the context of the wider social world.

---

[37] *Strawberry Boy*, p. 132
[38] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 7

Will's Impasse: The Invalidation Of C.N.D., The *Status Quo*'s Semantic Self-Consolidation And The Sense Of Estrangement From Language

The defining theme of each novel is symbolized by an image, which in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* is that of the crabs in Chapel Market 'struggling mutely to reach the sea. You could hear their grinding claws as they rose and fell and heaved and dropped [...]. You didn't want to play the game any more.'[39] This image of futility not only reflects Will's individual crisis but also encapsulates the climate of the times. While Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* never contemplates *not* rejecting the game, and Joanna's participation in *Fowler's Snare* is feigned and lacking in conviction, the intensity of Will's despair stems from what he believes himself to have lost.

> From your forties nothing came [...]. Smells and sounds from those years evoked nothing. The years without tendrils had concertina'd together [...]. All your associations went backwards to your youth only. "And now I often wish the night had borne my breath away."[40]

This sentiment echoes the tone of the diaries of Reck-Malleczewen, written in the shadow of the Nazi régime. 'It is as though all the light had gone out of the world. It is as though our lives are an ebbing tide that recedes farther and farther down a sandbank - and you think that the tide will never come back again, never in your life.'[41] Will's choice of metaphor in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* is informed by Bettelheim's contention that the shadow of the concentration camp is not an aberration but occupies the extreme end of the social continuum. Will's identification with the stranded crabs, dying slowly and pointlessly in exile from their natural "home," is a site of multiple resonance in the novel. 'Each time the water came to lift you, it only lapped at you and then receded, and you were left with an ocean in your ears which you could never

---

[39] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 78
[40] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 115

reach. Miles of dry shingle lay between you and the place where you wanted to be.'[42] The reason this existential anguish seems so pronounced in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* is that Will retains, metaphorically, the memory of the sea, a perceived point of reference that his predecessors in Dawson's fiction lacked. Will attributes his metaphysical exile to his loss of youth and to the failure of C.N.D., whereas Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* and Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* feel alienated by the condition of consciousness itself. This is partly due to their relative youth and perhaps also partly to that of their creator. As Dawson's fiction develops, notions of communality are increasingly emphasized as "the enemy" paradoxically becomes more internalized and hence more elusive and harder to define.

The urban planners who sterilized the community space in *Strawberry Boy* (reanimated in the 'row of derelict houses'[43] near Wersby's old address) are replaced in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* by the even more anonymous enemy represented by the Bomb. Here the theories of "anti-psychiatry" that took root in the seventies complement a Foucauldian critique of the systematic internalization and hence invisibility of power. In the words of Nancy, a member of the musical quartet, ""Mid-air civilization doesn't need camps and Siberia. Ours oppress their citizens by deliberately lowering their consciousness."'[44] Nietzsche declares that the state is 'the coldest of all cold monsters [...]. Whatever it says, it lies - and whatever it has, it has stolen [...]. Only there, where the state ceases, does the man who is not superfluous begin.'[45] The complication, as demonstrated by Foucault, is that "the state," in its

---

[41] Reck-Malleczewen, F., *Diary of a Man in Despair*, trans. by Paul Rubens (London: Duckworth, 2000), p. 171

[42] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 42-3

[43] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 63

[44] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 46

[45] Nietzsche, F., *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. by R. J. Holingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 75

manifestation as an instrument of surveillance, is welcomed into each of its components who thus collude with normalizing power. The establishment and maintenance of the sense of superfluity challenges the validity of conventional ideas of counter-justice. Such complicity is conveyed in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* when Thelma's railings against Franco and Spanish fascism provoke the response '"I admire your integrity. But we do love the sunshine and the cities and the people. They seem [...] quite happy under the régime."'[46]

Foucauldian and anti-psychiatric theories coincide in their demonstration that not only are aggressors as ensnared by power as their victims, but that power's dynamic nature obscures the centrality of collusion. Furthermore in the light of the "happiness" of the oppressed, on a certain level distinctions between oppressed and oppressors cease to apply. As Le Bon argues,

> victims of the delusion that equality and liberty are the better assured by the multiplication of laws, nations daily consent to put up with trammels increasingly burdensome [...]. Accustomed to put up with every yoke, they soon end by desiring servitude, and lose all spontaneousness and energy.[47]

Although habitualization to proliferating laws indisputably pacifies, Dawson explores how power's internalization tends to allay the need for them. This is the conundrum that Deleuze and Guattari pose: 'why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were for their salvation.'[48] Foucault maintains that even if people 'know what they do, and often also *why* they do what they do, they seldom, if ever, know what what they do does.'[49] This contention emphasizes how the effects of actions tend to acquire an independent life. This diagnostic of power is manifested in the

---

[46] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 9
[47] Le Bon, p. 214
[48] *Anti-Œdipus*, p. 29
[49] in Dreyfus, H. & P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 187

discontinuity defining the relationship between "the system" and its agents, a phenomenon attributable to power's dynamic nature as discussed by Edward Thompson in his reference to the Cold War as

> a show which was put, by two rival entrepreneurs, upon the road in 1946 or 1947. The show has grown bigger and bigger; the entrepreneurs have lost control of it, as it has thrown up its own managers, administrators, producers and a huge supporting cast; these have a direct interest in its continuance, in its enlargement. Whatever happens, the show must go on. The Cold War has become a habit, an addiction. But it is a habit supported by very powerful material interests.[50]

These developments are informed by Foucault's demonstration that modern formulations of power have ceased to be merely repressive and prohibitive but are instead productive, attracting converts and by means of habitualization perpetually consolidating themselves.

Music, portrayed by Dawson as an interstitial space, is perceived by Will as it was by Wersby as a vehicle for the potential transcendence of "the show." Paradoxically however it is the presence of the show that gives the need for such a space its sense of urgency. The Cold War which functions as the novel's social background manifests the dynamic nature of normalizing power. Anti-psychiatric discourse posits a parallel between the evolution of methods of waging war and developments in "the war on mental illness." The Laingian critic Howarth-Williams condenses this analogy which informs the concerns of Dawson's fiction. He discusses the way in which a country like the United States, 'beset by internal contradictions, falling apart from the *inside*, creates a Them, external to itself (geographically locatable as North Vietnam), defines it as a threat, and achieves some sort of consolidation of itself by doing so.'[51] Dawson's engagement with this phenomenon in

---

[50] Thompson, E., "Europe, the Weak Link in the Cold War," in *Exterminism and Cold War*, p. 332
[51] *R. D. Laing. His work and its relevance for sociology*, p. 161.

The Ha-Ha, evoked by the response to "mental illness," is contextualized by the effects exerted by The Cold War in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. In each case, not only is the enemy a construct invoked to consolidate the concept of the group, but the evolution of the modes of constraint reveals the same underlying paradigmatic shift. Szasz encapsulates this analogy in his contention that just as in contemporary society 'soldiers need no longer be bayoneted to death in hand-to-hand combat, but may be killed instead by rockets from aeroplanes, so mental patients need no longer be wrapped in straitjackets but may be injected instead with drugs.'[52]

Foucault's histories are overlapping attempts 'to isolate a [...] disease,'[53] the disease being the power relation itself 'inasmuch as the relation is what determines the elements'[54] on which it comes to bear. The shared conceptual foundation of the subjects of these histories resonates within and between the transmission wires of normalizing power. Dawson's fiction likewise engages with this relation by examining from a range of perspectives its manifestations and effects. The metaphor of the raped girl adjusting to her pregnancy, through which in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* the tyranny of collusion is conveyed, derives an added intensity from Will's loss of the hope of its subversion. In the heyday of C.N.D. he sensed a 'revolution in consciousness' but in the shadow of Vietnam he sees the populace as having resumed its habit of submission.

> There is no over-population problem at the moment so they won't consent to a termination [and] as she grows big with it, she begins to [...] make friends with it, [...] becoming co-operative [...] instead of angry [...] with the State's baby

---

[52] *The Manufacture of Madness*, p. 179

[53] Rajchman, J., *Michel Foucault. The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 99

[54] Rabinow, P. (ed.), *Michel Foucault. Ethics. The Essential Works 1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), p. 59

> inside her, [...] smiling and acquiescent as though her freedom consisted in learning to adjust.[55]

This extended metaphor not only encapsulates the transition from the coercive to the collusive dynamic, it highlights a structural parallel between developments in Dawson's fiction and Foucault's growing emphasis on the need for an ascending analysis of power. The "rape" itself, representative of force, is presented as far less sinister than the nature of its aftermath through which are conveyed the insidious workings of power. When Zay in *The Cold Country* is raped by her uncle, her retrospective focus is on her connivance, as if her collusion were a preordained part of the plan. This phenomenon is echoed in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* by the observation that '"the scientists engineer the destruction of the world while the social scientists engineer our consent."'[56] In his essay on *Nineteen Eighty Four*, Paul Chilton examines how 'repression, suffering and misery [...] are conditioned by the "soft messages" of "choice" and "freedom," another aspect of newspeak which argues that those who do not enjoy them are failures in need of treatment.'[57] This contention highlights the fact that despite the denial of the use of force, its reintroduction remains an option if collusion should ever be withheld.

Dawson's novels trace this process in a range of different spheres, for example in *The Ha-Ha* when Josephine having proved impervious to social normalization her resistance is threatened by applications of E.C.T.. This phenomenon is echoed metaphorically by the fate of C.N.D., where those who demystify the semanticide contained in invocations of deterrence are consistently belittled and ignored. *The Ha-Ha* highlights the randomness of accepted constructions of truth, from the

---

[55] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 132
[56] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 153

unquestioned validity of sharing views about 'income-tax allowances'[58] to the implicit invalidity of questioning the sanctity of such impassioned debate. Control of language plays a pivotal rôle, with Josephine's concerns "diagnosed" as schizophrenic, and the aims of C.N.D. discredited as naïve. The purpose of Orwellian Newspeak, to limit the range of possible thought, is realized in the semantic war waged on C.N.D., a key site of resonance in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. The recurrent use of the word "deterrent" proves a potent symbol for attracting allegiance, not only because it instils the idea of its alleged function (replacing the more contentious "nuclear") but also by its implication of an "enemy." However, as Chilton demonstrates, allegiance was also impelled by establishing its status as "common-sense" (since 'to say "It is wrong to want to get rid of the deterrent" is almost self-evidently true').[59] This confirms Orwell's evocation of Newspeak fulfilling its purpose, where each reduction in the semantic range is a gain since

> the smaller the area of choice, the smaller the temptation to take thought. Ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centres at all [...]. It would have been possible, for example, to say *Big Brother is ungood*. But this statement, which to an orthodox ear merely conveyed a self-evident absurdity, could not have been sustained by reasoned argument, because the necessary words were not available.[60]

Just as in *The Ha-Ha* the silencing of Josephine's implied dissent is conducted by psychiatrists ("those in the know"), the Bomb, as the M.P. in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* reassures Will and Thelma, will be kept '"only in responsible hands."'[61] This analogy, informed by Foucault's demonstration of the '"psychiatrization" of everyday

---

[57] *Nineteen Eighty-Four' in 1984. Autonomy, Control & Communication*, Crispin Aubrey & Paul Chilton (eds.) (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1983), p. 6
[58] *The Ha-Ha*, p. 106
[59] Chilton, P., "Newspeak: It's the Real Thing," in *1984. Autonomy, Control & Communication*, p. 38
[60] Orwell, G., "Appendix: The Principles of Newspeak," in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 249
[61] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 136

life,'[62] highlights how Dawson portrays paternalism as a cover story concocted to pre-emptively deny the assaults of the normalizing drive. Moreover in Zamyatin's *We*, the inspiration for *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Big Brother's precursor is ominously known as the Benefactor. Furthermore just as Josephine is bombarded by electricity when more conventional methods of inducing conformity fail, anti-nuclear protest is quashed by violence if it persists in rejecting consensus "common sense." The following exchange in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* encapsulates these tendencies of normalizing power.

"'The Americans aren't fascists yet. Look at all the dissent inside America."

"And look how dissent is treated. What about tear-gas and the Kent state shootings.'"[63] In both cases, force is held in reserve. In Foucauldian terms, the failure or refusal to collude in the transmission of the democratic anonymous charge of normalizing power results in subjection to "premodern" applications of force.

Both Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* and C.N.D. as evoked in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* function as that irritant the conscience, and as such attract the assaults of force. This phenomenon is encapsulated by Reck-Malleczewen's metaphor: 'the barometer obstinately refused to register "clear and fine" - so they smashed it.'[64] Dawson's fiction dramatizes how oppositional voices that resist the discourse of the *status quo* are subjected to applications of force which function as the Hyde to the Jekyll of the normalizing drive. Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* is institutionalized for unwittingly challenging the perceived inviolability of the blueprints of "normal" social behaviour, Saul in *Strawberry Boy* is imprisoned when he ceases to collude with the forces of "benevolent" liberality, and C.N.D. is discredited for daring to question the sacrosanct assumption that those representing the populace know best. All are seen as

---

[62] *Language, counter-memory, practice*, p. 229
[63] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 149

a threat because they represent perspective. Josephine is preoccupied with the randomness of life, Saul exposes the coercive currents that underlie the posture of concern, and C.N.D. casts light on the mystifying rhetoric of temporal individualism and spatial nationalism. This sense of perspective constitutes the very essence of conscience, from which have been subtracted the conventions of received morality. Both Josephine and C.N.D. fulfil the same symbolic function as the eyes in H. G. Wells' allegorical story "Country of The Blind."

> "Those queer things that are called the eyes [...] affect his brain [...]. His eyelids move, and consequently his brain is in a constant state of irritation and distraction [...]. In order to cure him [...], all we need to do is a simple and easy surgical operation - namely, to remove those irritant bodies [...]. Then he will be most perfectly sane, and a quite admirable citizen."[65]

The potential threat seen to be posed by Josephine and C.N.D. is highlighted by Fromm's contention that 'round pegs in square holes tend to have dangerous thoughts about the social system and to infect others with their discontents.'[66] As Dawson's fiction demonstrates, if the infection proves resistant to semantic antibiotics, its host is quarantined to enable techniques of normalization to be more forcibly applied.

Deleuze maintains that 'the history of a thing, in general, is the succession of forces which take possession of it and the co-existence of the forces that struggle for possession. The same object, the same phenomenon, changes sense depending on the force which appropriates it.'[67] Foucault's genealogies and Dawson's fiction engage with the phenomenon of normalizing power by chronicling its effects on a range of targets. However in their later works both writers present these targets as functioning concomitantly as vehicles of power's articulation, a shift which is clearly discernible

---

64 *Diary of a Man in Despair*, p. 132
65 cited in Fromm, E., *The Sane Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), pp. 192-3
66 *The Sane Society*, p. 227
67 *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 3

as Dawson's fiction evolves. While Josephine and Joanna are presented as merely acted upon, her later protagonists are enmeshed in power's dynamic. Just as in *Strawberry Boy* Saul's paranoid fantasies of Ruth's imagined motives replicate the reductive stereotypes by which his own identity is eroded and redefined, Will's treatment of Thelma in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* enacts the very disregard by which he feels oppressed. When "victims" can be incited to adopt the rôle of "aggressor" when the situation permits it, they have been fully "normalized" and thus operations of power no longer need revert to those of force. Dawson's fiction is animated by Foucault's question 'Who is programming my movements [...]?'[68] and by his exploration of how power 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, [...] and inserts itself into their [...] attitudes.'[69] In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* Julius, a member of the musical quartet, asks,

> "Who orchestrates the newspapers? Who is the mind … which is the thermostat that tells "them" when to switch us off? Who advises the home secretary as to when we are and when we are not dangerous? Who advises the newspapers to treat C.N.D. as a joke [...]? Who *does* orchestrate the newspapers?"[70]

Although such questions seem unanswerable, Foucault's analysis of the *internalization* of power helps to explain their unanswerability. His histories trace the syncretic fracture of monolithic, identifiable pre-modern power into a dynamic, anonymous and democratic charge. Thus the "policing" process, no longer primarily the domain of elected representatives of "the State," has become a complex arrangement of inter- and intra-subjective gazes that traverse and construct the social body. Will's unspoken hallucinated response to the question posed by Julius, 'The

---

[68] *Politics Philosophy Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, p. 103
[69] *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, p. 39
[70] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 23-4

newscaster's eye [...] gave you a conspiratorial wink,'[71] conveys these intimations of collusion. The mode of implantation of the metaphorical baby of the State pales into insignificance in the light of the compliance that defines its aftermath. As Eco argues, power compared to force 'is far more subtle and exploits a far more widespread consensus, and heals the wound received at that point, always and necessarily marginal.'[72]

When Will reflects that 'the Bomb had proliferated and the British had accepted their female hospital role,'[73] the image recalls Miss Dicks in *The Cold Country* awaiting the lobotomy that kills her. However this surrender to the presumed inevitability of only ever being acted on is balanced by the novel's central image. For although the crabs in Chapel Market will never reach the sea, they continue to struggle nonetheless. Unlike the fly making its way across the ceiling, with which Josephine identifies in *The Ha-Ha*, their travails are a direct response to the redefinition of their function. Their behaviour only appears unintelligible because of the imposition of an artificial context. Like Will, they are enacting defence mechanisms which have hitherto preserved them but which are confounded by their unprecedented change of context. Despite what Foucault refers to as the 'fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us,'[74] Dawson's later protagonists, unlike her earlier ones, engage with this phenomenon and (if at times counter-productively) persist in attempting to surmount it.

In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, the remembered tensions between Wersby and Will, resumed in a different key by Will and Thelma, focus the dilemma posed by the

---

71 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 25
72 Eco, U., "Language, Power, Force," in *Travels In Hyperreality*, p. 250
73 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 138
74 Foucault, M., in *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. xiv

novel. The hunger for organized protest embodied by the past Will and by the present Thelma is textually juxtaposed with the solitary search for meaning conducted by Wersby and by the Will of the present who aches for the marches that sustained his love for his wife and that made Wersby's music seem irrelevant and sterile. Dawson evokes the optimism of C.N.D. in its heyday through Will's recollections of how the loud-speaker like a conductor brought together the disparate groups, united by a common cause. '"Quakers, can you get behind the Anarcho-Syndicalists? [...] Eton College, can you move in behind Holborn Office Cleaners."'[75] '"Motherwell behind Clapton Young Communists." [...] The Star of David moved. The miners' huge emblematic banner rose in the wind.'[76] '"Hackney and Islington can you move in behind Spanish Anarchists [...]." The black C.N.D. banner: "Aldermaston to London. Easter 1961."'[77] This rejoicing at the rejection of "the female hospital rôle" is echoed by the epiphanic realization of Mary Barnes, a patient of Laing, that 'the moment mattered, but so did the century.' [78] However for Will this temporal fusion proves to be short-lived.

While the failure of protest in *Strawberry Boy* is attributable to what Barthes defines as the latent germ of power present 'even in the liberatory impulses which attempt to counteract it,' [79] in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* protest fails for practical reasons rather than for epistemological ones. Here the notion of success itself is challenged, for C.N.D.'s mode of resistance is defined by the absence of the totalizing drive and encapsulates diversity and debate. Although the commune in *Strawberry*

---

[75] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 143
[76] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 126
[77] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 127
[78] Barnes, M. & J. Berke, *Mary Barnes. Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 208
[79] Barthes, R., "Inaugural Lecture, Collège de France" (1977), reprinted in S. Sontag (ed.), *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), p. 459

Boy could be said to have "succeeded," at least temporarily, it sacrificed in the process the very ideals that it purported to symbolize. Fromm outlines this all too familiar phenomenon where ideals 'remain a stock of conscious convictions, but people fail to act according to them in a critical hour.'[80] Conversely the source of the demise of C.N.D. is the self-same element that gave it its mobilizing power. For instead of the usual slogans of protest (shibboleths invoked to pre-empt debate and then deny its absence), opposing voices fracture the ideological unity of the march.

> "Those who don't want to be taken over by the imperialists at the head of this march turn left at the next set of traffic lights." [...] "Ignore diversionary tactics." [...] "Ignore the bourgeois leadership [...]. The C.I.A. is operating at the head of this column. Just siphoning off your anger. Come to a meeting where a real rationale will be given." [...] The march split. The futility of protest. [...] Now you felt you were a puppet mechanically taking part in some charade.[81]

The way in which disillusionment is projected back and forth is dramatized when Will calls Thelma 'shallow,' 'falsely animated' and 'manic.'[82] Just as the image of a puppet implicitly raises the question of who holds the strings, feelings of impotence produce the need to locate an external focus of blame, a phenomenon conveyed by the question posed by Julius, "By whom are the newspapers controlled?" However, as Fromm argues, this search, whether expressed implicitly and generally as by Will, or explicitly and specifically as by Julius, is to some degree a red herring, since

> the serious threat [...] is the existence within our own personal attitudes and within our own institutions of conditions which have given a victory to external authority, discipline, uniformity and dependence [...]. The battlefield is [...] accordingly here - within ourselves and our institutions.[83]

Because the habitualized need to identify an oppressor is so ingrained (and indeed may once have been a prerequisite for self-preservation), modes of resistance, as

---

[80] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 241
[81] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 146
[82] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 33

Foucault demonstrates, have failed to keep pace with the evolution of manifestations of power. As Dawson's fiction implies, without a sustained engagement with the function of collusion, resistance remains anachronistic and diversionary.

Although Wersby aroused Will's moral disapproval for holding himself aloof from organized protest, he comes to be seen to symbolize an alternative form of protest with which Will increasingly identifies despite having at the time dismissed it as a pretext for evasion. He recalls having asked in rhetorical outrage, '"How can an artist whose aim is to heighten consciousness not stand up against the Cold Warriors using civilians as bargaining power in their [...] ideological games?"' Only now does Wersby's response, '"The state is the state whether it bans the Bomb or not,"' [84] which at the time he interpreted as symptomatic of quietism, strike him as encapsulating courage and conviction. For Wersby lived his proposed solution without the support of banners or slogans or the luxury of being understood. '"If [...] man is doomed to destroy himself then he will [...]. This grave dissatisfaction with self and life can only be overcome by art."'[85] This attitude is contextualized by Foucault's doubts that there can ever 'be any counter-justice in the strict sense of the term.'[86] Wersby's resistance to co-opting music as an *agent* of counter-justice is manifested in his horror at discerning the bombast and rhetoric he has unwittingly allowed to infiltrate his composition. Foucault's examination of 'the subtle ways in which a yearning to be outside power has been produced by a particular regime whose operation is obscured as a result of that desire'[87] illuminates Wersby's vigilance against this tendency of power to insinuate itself into the interstitial space through which its effects could be

---

[83] *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 3
[84] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 113
[85] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 112
[86] cited in Macey, D., *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 300

transcended. Wersby's resistance to diversionary fervour recalls the exchange described by Langston Hughes: '"But jazz is decadent bourgeois music," I was told, for that is what the Soviet press had hammered into Russian heads. "It's my music," I said, "and I wouldn't give up jazz for a world revolution."'[88] However given its tendency to be misconstrued as "counter-revolutionary" a commitment to this stance requires conviction. Indeed in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* it takes Will half a lifetime to realize that "the State" can come to function as a scapegoat as well as a producer of scapegoats. For despite the horrors unleashed in its name it also resides in internalized form within its very critics.

Paul, ironically a member of the peace-group, reformulates the tactics of the Soviet press, interrupting Will's attempts to interpret the composition with his shrieks of '"Bourgeois music [...]. You and your class have bugged the masses."'[89] His function in the novel, replicating Bee's in *Strawberry Boy*, is to illustrate the diversity of vehicles of the normalizing drive. The fact that in his rôle as protester he considers himself opposed to the voice of the majority highlights the futility of any opposition that ignores internalization and overlooks the function of collusion. His avidity to mock and thereby block the interstitial uncannily mirrors the tactics of the *status quo* to which he is purportedly opposed. Paul's attitudes echo those of the "totalitarian ideologists" invoked by Skvorecky who 'loathe art, the product of a yearning for life' because it 'evades control - if controlled and legislated, it perishes.'[90] Although Will's yearning is unfulfilled, it arouses Paul's animosity because it contains implicit intimations of interstitial places inaccessible to his proselytizing zeal.

---

[87] McGowen, R., "Power and Humanity, or Foucault among the historians," in Jones & Porter, p. 97
[88] quoted in Svorecky, J., *The Bass Saxophone*, trans. by Kaca Polackova (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1980), prolegomenon
[89] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 157

Conversely Wersby's scepticism is informed not only by Cioran's claim that 'the ages of fervor abound in bloody exploits'[91] but also by Fanon who justified his mistrust of "fervour" by contending that whenever 'it has burst out somewhere' it has brought in its wake 'contempt for man.'[92] Paul's contempt for what "man" hopes to realize and celebrate through music is a by-product of his fervour, for anything that falls outside fervour's domain provokes a sense of unease which he averts by sublimating into derision. This contempt and his rejection of debate set such alarm bells ringing about his envisaged future world that the lack of conviction behind his posturing ultimately comes as a relief. The fact that his resistance to heterogeneity reflects the "intolerance of ambiguity" that Adorno argues denotes the "authoritarian personality"[93] intensifies the irony of his rôle as representative of the "peace group." The concept of fervour, introduced in *Strawberry Boy* and developed in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, is associated with the tyranny of "consensus" and thus with the rhetoric that semantically and conceptually consolidates and validates "the group." The potential of music to transcend the need for slogans arises from its interstitial status through which this transcendence can be both attained and expressed. Although, as Foucault argues, no point exists external to power since power traverses and produces the social network, he contends that built into the structure of this network are latent spaces of potential freedom. However by contrast conventional forms of protest, even (or, arguably, especially) those that appear to have achieved their aims, have a tendency to compromise the ideals of the protesters who contract both the tactics and the modes of their justification from the structures they purportedly

---

90 "Foreword: Red Music," in *The Bass Saxophone*, p. 8
91 *A Short History of Decay*, p. 3
92 *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 11

oppose. This is the tendency alluded to in Cioran's conviction that 'everything man achieves necessarily turns against him.'[94]

At a structural level, the source of the failure of conventional forms of protest as portrayed in Dawson's fiction is confusion about the micropolitical circulation of power. For not only does power's dialectic tend to be misconstrued as issuing solely from an unspecified external source rather than as something systematically internalized, it is widely misinterpreted as an entity to be reclaimed, static and identifiable rather than an activating charge. What tends to be overlooked is its dynamic nature and the fact that, in Fromm's words, to have "power over" is a perversion of having the "power to."[95] Dawson's fiction implies that liberation from the abuses of power is only of value if taken as a starting point for Fromm's "power to" (something Wersby and later Will attempt to achieve through music). Foucault conceived of freedom not as 'a process with an end' but as 'the motor and principle' of the 'endless questioning of constituted experience.'[96] It is thus construed not as a destination but an attitude of mind informing the nature of the search.

Through music Will longs to access a space beyond the chatter that trivializes even what it purports to venerate. ""Which composer gives you the greatest sense of eternity?""[97] Thelma bleats, in precisely the same tone as she counter-productively promises ""I'm going to get you out of that shell of yours.""[98] Thus she consigns to the same realm of banality her husband's passion and his feeling of exile from his passion. Similarly the residue of Will's political engagement seems to be reduced to

---

[93] cited in Adorno T. W., *Æsthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), p. 203

[94] *The Trouble with Being Born*, pp. 206-7

[95] *Man for Himself. An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, p. 88

[96] *Michel Foucault. The Freedom of Philosophy*, p. 7

[97] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 4

the level of farce. 'Paul, a member of your peace group, danced in. [...] "What are we going to say to the British black?"'[99] Even George, in a genuine if doomed attempt to convey his support, can only manage '"Ah well. We all have our dark nights of the soul."'[100] Since, as Dawson implies, language seems to contain the seeds of its imminent mutation into cliché, protest seems forethwarted by the very linguistic gesture on which its potential for activation relies. This is the context in which Eco argues that language, or the "given" language, serves as a model for power 'because it compels me to use already formulated stereotypes,'[101] generated by and consolidating a contentious ideology of consensus. Doctorow's *World's Fair* evokes this levelling and consequently trivializing tendency of language when the broadcaster praises 'Forhan's toothpaste [...] in the same fervent tones with which he described democracy's battle against fascism. If you didn't listen carefully, you might think that fascism and bleeding gums were the same thing.'[102] This homogenization of content, established by the homogenizing tendencies of language itself, calls into further doubt the connotations of "fervour." As Steiner argues, 'the grammar of mediocrity enforced by ideological fear and censorship in the East is [...] matched by the detergent emptiness and uniformity of the jargon of the media and the market-place in the West.'[103] This is the context in which Foucault maintains that 'we are [...] governed and paralysed by language.'[104] By regularizing experience, language threatens to displace the interstitial, a phenomenon addressed in Chomsky's *Manufacturing*

---

[98] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 35
[99] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 156
[100] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 172
[101] Eco, U., "Language, Power, Force," in *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, p. 241
[102] Doctorow, E. L., *World's Fair* (London: Picador, 1985), p. 185
[103] Steiner, G., *Language and Silence. Essays 1958-1966* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1990), p. 14
[104] Foucault, M. *The Order of Things: An Archælogy of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1971), p. 298

Consent which equates the rôle of propaganda in a "democracy" with that of explicit violence under totalitarianism.

In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* the ostensible source of Will's paralysis is his disenchantment with C.N.D. which has convinced him of "the futility of protest." While 'the world's greatest power' is

> destroying one of the smallest and poorest [...], you felt only light-headedness and a feeling of disrelation as you marched along with your banner hearing the chants [...], as if these shouts could have anything to do with the napalm, the B52s [...]. But silence couldn't water the letters of the alphabet till they brought about peace. Where were the words? Where were they hidden?[105]

His despair at the failure and inadequacy of language, which incidentally testifies to a pre-existing faith in it, echoes Josephine's question in *The Ha-Ha*: 'What words were *the* words, the things that carried, the words that counted and qualified you for the world of other people?'[106] Canetti chronicles this sense of alienation in a world so 'saturated with slogans' that it is 'hard to find a place [...] free of them, where the air' is 'fit to breathe.'[107] All Dawson's protagonists are to some extent preoccupied with the disrelation between words and what they seek or purport to convey. In her later novels, however, this unease in its generality is displaced by a more specific anxiety, as words are portrayed as killing in the translation the very ideals they purportedly enshrine. This is why her later protagonists see music as a means of potentially transcending the totalizing tendencies of language.

To Will and to Wersby as constructed in Will's memory music symbolizes the potential for resistance to the semantic distortions that seem to thwart conventional forms of protest. 'You waited for music to come and take the place of words and things. You waited as an insomniac waits for sleep, waits to be picked up and carried

---

105 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 145
106 *The Ha-Ha*, p, 95

away on a tide of sleep.'[108] Ondaatje's contention that words bend reality 'like sticks in water'[109] encapsulates not only the distorting tendencies of language but also the way in which it severs what it seeks to reflect since the word and the concept embody and occupy mutually exclusive elements. Will tries in vain to convey his despair '"of being able to bridge the gulf between the outer world of speech and action and things. Wars. And the inner world of triumph over them."'[110] Although music was once the bridge, the outer world has invaded the inner from which its presence could be felt. 'The war had taken away your inner space [...]. You were separate from these actions. You were watching yourself.'[111] As Will perceives it, 'I am dead' and in 'exile from the things I love. "I [neither] see nor feel how beautiful they are."'[112] His sense of estrangement confines his experience to the realm of the hypothetical as if the times have displaced him from the centre of himself. Music was the means by which he came to inhabit his life but the onslaughts of the outer world have deadened his receptiveness to the interstitial transcendence it could reflect and activate. The loss of Will's inner space makes him feel that only as a spectator can intensity be envisaged, and even then only as an impostor and a voyeur.

> You thought of a person hanging for sixteen hours by his nailed hands and feet, and given vinegar when he asked for water [...]. How could it possibly be, such pain? [...] Napalm? It was impossible to think of it happening to one person, let alone thousands. The men and women and children who had to endure unquenchable fire [...]. Or fragmentation bombs splintering through their bodies [...]. Such pain wasn't possible, something cried out at you [...]. Some God would intervene [...]. But you knew none did [...]. You could hear their voices screaming from thousands of miles away as clearly as you had

---

[107] Canetti, E., *The Play of the Eyes*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Granta, 1999), p. 134
[108] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 159
[109] Ondaatje, M., *The English Patient* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1992), p. 238
[110] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 34
[111] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 155
[112] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 155

> heard the nurses screaming during the flying bombs when their hostel got a direct hit.[113]

Bessie Head expresses the same phenomenon in her novel *A Question of Power*. 'If she cried about one thing, she cried about other things too. Pain was not only pain. It was a blinding daze of agony piling up on all sides.'[114]

A factor in the cumulative process of Will's breakdown is his awareness of his incapacity to conceptualize the full extent of other people's agony, which blurs into just such a "daze." However Will feels vague intimations of their pain, impotence in the face of it and irrational but contextually intelligible guilt about his insulation from an unmediated experience of it. Therefore paradoxically the source of his suffering is his knowledge of the vicariousness and inadequacy of his suffering. The outrage, as he experiences it, is his failure to muster a sufficient sense of outrage. This is the context in which Jaspers contends, 'that I am still alive when such things have been done weighs on me as a guilt that cannot be expiated,' [115] an evocation of "survivor guilt" that reflects the preoccupations of Elie Wiesel's novel *The Fifth Son*. 'I suffer from an Event that I have not even experienced. A feeling of void: from a past that has made History tremble I have retained only words.'[116] Will, however, is haunted by the present as well as the past. As Adorno proposes in *Negative Dialectics*, the inner deadlock arises from the awareness that the detachment required for psychic survival is the same as that of the bedrock of the horrors of recent history.[117] This is the context in which Bauman contends that 'the moral self is a self always haunted by the

---

[113] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 139
[114] Head, B., *A Question of Power* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1974), p. 68
[115] quoted in *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 89
[116] Wiesel, E., *The Fifth Son*, trans. by Marion Wiesel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), p. 192
[117] Adorno, T., *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973)

suspicion that it is not moral enough.'[118] In much the same way, the suffering self as portrayed in Dawson's later fiction seems haunted by the suspicion that it fails to suffer enough. It is this haunting that estranges Will from music in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, a phenomenon illuminated in Brecht's "To Posterity": 'What times are these, when / to speak of trees is almost a crime / because it passes in silence over such infamy.'[119]

Will's experience of his existence is encapsulated by Nietzsche's description of 'life without music' as 'an error, a burden' and 'an exile.'[120] Only in the aftermath of breakdown does Will decode the message of the Wersby composition: that what Brecht conveys through the image of trees is defined by the fact that its existence symbolizes the defiance of infamy, and that it thus remains uncompromised by it. In the meantime, impotence within the world, be it the world of his marriage or the world of nuclear threat, has so invaded his inner space that 'the process of playing music had become more physically and mentally agonising than unsuccessful love-making.'[121]

Until the war in Vietnam he felt that music could counter the assaults of power, but the Cold War leaves him stranded like the crabs in Chapel Market whose travails are 'slow and laboured and mute and blind. They reminded me of - I felt we are like them, clambering forever slowly up piles of hard shells like crockery in search of the sea where we came from and never finding it. It is the story of my life since C.N.D.'[122] This image encapsulates Will's preoccupations in the novel - the

---

118 *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 80
119 quoted in *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 40
120 quoted in Gillespie, M. A., "Nietzsche's Musical Politics," in *Nietzsche's New Seas. Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics & Politics*, ed. by Gillespie, M. A. & T. B. Strong (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 119
121 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 108
122 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 20

apocalyptic vision of staggering helplessly over radioactive wastes, the sense of exile and the feeling of being up for sale.

Foucault's theories of the internalization of power inform the phenomenon of the war in Vietnam, after which almost as many U.S. soldiers committed suicide as were killed in the war.[123] Even when propaganda is exposed for what it is, the sense of identification with normalizing power means that, rather than challenge it, the dissenting organ (the myth of whose consent can no longer be sustained) chooses to annihilate itself. Applications of force are no longer required when the awe evoked by the internalized *status quo* induces an identical submission. It is its illustration of this development, even more than the atrocities themselves, that locates the war in Vietnam as the event Will blames (or scapegoats) for his paralysis in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. In the light of power's internalization, the direct action of C.N.D. strikes him with hindsight as having been so farcical that in retrospect he perceives his involvement as a mimicry of the contortions of a puppet. For despite the existence of structures to be opposed, power's dynamic nature dissolves the distinctions between inner constraint and constraint which is externally imposed. Therefore even if the "official enemy" could have been overthrown, little would have been achieved since the function of internalization within the marchers themselves has remained unexamined and unaddressed.

---

123 "Suckers," in *Heroes*, p. 119 (figures from *New Statesman*, Feb. 23, 1979)

Childhood As Memory And Construct: The Discovery Of Music And The Effects Of War

In memory, Will's childhood, played out against the Second World War and the climate that produced it, evokes a time when, since the threat could be identified, the sense of collusion was unknown. Like Wersby's youth, which he associates in *Strawberry Boy* with intimations of the perpetual presence of war, destruction, actual or imminent, defines Will's childhood whose constructed recollection has such resonance in *A Field Of Scarlet Poppies*.

> "If there were another war ..." [...] You began to play a game of "is" and "isn't." [...] You would ask your mother to play the piano. If she said "All right" it isn't. If she said "Just let me take off my pinafore first," it is. [...] If the lady asked for beans, it is. If she asked for sugar then it isn't. At the counter they were talking about the bombing of Barcelona [...]. As you passed the derelict houses in Hotspur and Lollard Street you saw them like the bombed houses of Barcelona and Madrid.[124]

'The Spanish Republic fell and German troops entered Prague [...]. An animal curiosity came over you. You wanted to know what the world looked like now that you were at war again.'[125] The reason that nothing feels different is that having outlasted the previous war the sense of threat is projected onto and absorbed by the present one. Will's life up until then had been overshadowed by his mother's preoccupation with the after-effects of the First World War. 'She told you about the gas attacks and her two brothers who were killed by gassing, and the third one who came back with his head held on one side and a fixed smile on his face,'[126] 'Uncle George in the hospital' who 'never spoke' except to rhyme what you said.[127] This is

---

[124] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 71
[125] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 73
[126] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 61
[127] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 65

why the outbreak of war goes virtually unnoticed. 'Nothing had changed [...]. No cataclysm under the white sky.'[128]

The only distinction for Will is that the experience of war is no longer a vicarious one but something of his own. Thus it functions as his rite of passage, his liberation from the double remove of his mother's recollections. However not until adulthood does his own war begin, the one that exiles him from his only possible means of its transcendence. Now

> a thin membrane would hang between you and the Opus 130. So thin you thought you could, but never did, succeed in piercing it. You waited as the insomniac waits for sleep. You waited as the beached crab waits for high tide to sweep over it and engulf it. But the tide only lifted you so far and dropped you back where you had been.[129]

This sense of paralysis represents the antithesis to the strange sense of elation that came from feeling under direct attack. 'The searchlights were doing sword-fights in the sky [...]. Shrapnel was falling [...]. You could feel the world's breath and the ends of the world seemed to reach you.'[130] The image of the sword-fighting searchlights is recaptured in the evocation of C.N.D. in its heyday, defined by colour and movement and the sense of comradeship. Also Will's feeling of emptiness in the wake of the bombing raids is reanimated in the feeling of blankness following the loss of his political conviction, a parallel suggesting the ultimate irrelevance of distinctions between victory and defeat. The atmosphere of the Cold War replicates that between the wars since both produce a feeling of exile and dread. Despite (or because of) the temporal and spatial remove, they invade Will's inner world while conversely the Second World War whose effects he directly witnessed only exhilarated him. 'You were determined to stay alive. You only had a local fear. It wasn't invasive. It didn't

---

[128] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 75
[129] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 47

invade your inner space as the First World War had done.'[131] '"I transcend the war" you would have run off to school crying if you had known the word [...]. Your war was to come much later.'[132]

The difference is illuminated by Foucault's distinction between the effects of an identifiable and an unidentifiable enemy. Deleuze asks, 'how can the present be constituted in time? How can the present pass? [...] The present must coexist with itself as past and yet to come [...], a synthesis of becoming and the being which is affirmed in becoming, a synthesis of double affirmation.'[133] Both the source and manifestation of Will's present crisis is the intensified recurrence of the sense of impotence provoked by the symbolic presence of the First World War and the concomitant spectre of another. However the *outbreak* of war, which he links with his discovery of music, unleashes the potential for resistance. Bach's Chorale Prelude "Sanctify Us" activates 'a sudden high white conviction that you too could enter the kingdom of beauty [...] and a feeling that there was a world reserved and untouched by anything that man could do.'[134] There is, however, a paradox implicit in the fact that this realization is activated by a synergy of what "man" has done and the function of the listener and interpreter in the dynamic. The discovery of transcendence is Will's initiation as he realizes that, even though the war seemed preordained, the element of surprise in music suggests that not everything is.

Adorno locates music's potential for interstitial resistance as inherent in the implosion of the eternal and the incalculable and haphazard. Since every tone is 'determined by the construction of the whole work, the difference between the

---

130 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 80
131 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 81
132 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 83
133 *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, p. 48

essential and the coincidental disappears.'[135] There is thus no reason why Will's experience of music should be any less intense than his experience of war, whose all-pervasiveness seems strangely incidental. The war symbolizes a conceptual springboard from which the St. John's Passion derives its urgency and immediacy as a 'burst of joy in place of terror and anguish and remorse. A structure of hope and forgiveness and surprise.'[136] Will is struck instinctively by what took Wersby a lifetime to understand and express, compounding the intertextual resonances of *Strawberry Boy* and *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. 'You were a musician. You played over this smell of war, this drought, this death.'[137] The interstitial space forged by music stems from this element of surprise and represents the rejection of constructing an alternative system rather than creating and activating spaces latent within the existing one.

Music inspires Will not to deny the agony but to play in defiance of it, as dramatized by the juxtaposition of the musical titles and the place names that signify the onward march of the war. Iris Murdoch contends that by fusing emotion and intellect 'into a limited whole,' art 'illuminates accident and contingency' and 'opens up spaces for reflection.'[138] In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* Will's discovery of music, something of his own rather than something established as inevitable by his mother, is presented as the conceptual antithesis of war. However the joy of its discovery is intensified by his youth, before the fracture of "intellect" and "emotion" which only later becomes an obsessive concern. Even in adulthood, exiled from youth, he still

---

[134] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 83

[135] Adorno, T. W. *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. by Anne G. Mitchell & Wesley V. Bloomster (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), p. 59

[136] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 84

[137] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 86

[138] Murdoch, I., *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 3

sees music as a sine qua non and symbol of a life worth living. 'I can no longer play well. One day I will just stop being able to play at all.'[139] Just as the hope of his self-salvation is implicit in the fact that he continues to "mind," in his continuing desire for engagement with the world lie the seeds of his potential for resistance.

In the present, the musical quartet is riven by dispute as to whether and to what extent music can or should be combined with conventional notions of protest. Nancy tries 'several times to get the quartet to give a recital to raise funds for "Medical Aid to Vietnam." But George always stood out against the idea:

"We are not here to take sides."'[140] 'You had wanted to give a recital for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament but George had put his foot down:

"Artists become political only at great cost."'[141] Although George's attitude recalls that of Wersby, because he is addressing colleagues rather than a lover he expresses himself with a greater degree of equanimity. He is true to the spirit of the Wersby composition as while he is far from unaffected by the times he refuses to confront them on their own terms and thus risk contracting their tendencies. Adorno's contention that music is not 'indifferent to time' because 'the subjective moments of expression liberate themselves from the continuum of time'[142] highlights music's potential for resistance. Its transcendence of time reveals and produces interstitial spaces within but inaccessible to the totalizing tendencies of power.

Far from disregarding ethics, Wersby believed that they could be upheld only if they rejected the terms of what they sought to surmount. This belief is contextualized by Fromm's contention that the ethical thinker 'may be the one who

---

139 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 37
140 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 39-40
141 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 125
142 *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 56

"crieth in the wilderness," but only if this voice remains alive and uncompromising' can the wilderness be transformed into 'fertile land.'[143] If the "victory" of an oppositional group required the distortion of its voice, or of any of its voices, for Wersby the victory would have been Pyrrhic. His position, however, shared by George and increasingly by Will, is one of double torment. For while he is haunted by everything that produces the need for protest, because he sees conventional forms of protest as a diversion he is not only denied the luxury of comradeship and purpose, he provokes the hostility of conventional protesters.

Rilke describes the phenomenon where those who cannot 'endure that anything should contain itself and strive according to its own nature [...] begin their seduction [...] against the solitary one, who will, perhaps, hold out.'[144] Dawson's fiction presents this "seduction" in the form of the onslaughts of the normalizing drive. Wersby held out but paid with his life, while Will's "holding out" is simply a deferral of breakdown. However, unlike Dawson's earlier protagonists, he wants to engage in a dialogue with the "seducers," suspecting that if he could transform his exile the seduction could be transformed into an alliance. Neither does he ultimately blame them, just as he ultimately realizes that even Vietnam 'only triggered [...] off'[145] the paralysis born of the synergy of his temperament and events, or the resonance of his failure to assimilate events. Furthermore, hope is evident even in his struggle to articulate the deadlock. '"I have just temporarily lost, temporarily I hope, lost the obsession that kept me going."'[146] His past self played 'as though it was the

---

[143] *Man for Himself. An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, p. 244
[144] Rilke, R. M., *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. by M. D. Herter Norton (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), pp. 158-9
[145] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 31
[146] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 31

only relevant response to the waste [...], up and away from the desolation,'[147] an attitude contextualized by Adorno's view of music as 'an ideology insofar as it asserts itself as an ontological being-in-itself beyond social tensions.'[148] However Will's crisis gathers momentum less because social tensions remain unresolved than because he feels they have come to be welcomed as a pretext for personal evasion. As Nancy puts it, '"We're like a lot of people in a massive Twilight Home for the Aged. We just sit there in our wheel-chairs half-grumbling, half-terrorized by the staff, but somehow compliant and acquiescing."'[149] This metaphor of adjustment reinforces the image of the pacification of the "implantee" of the baby of the State and encapsulates the state of mind produced by the failure of C.N.D..

The crisis is precipitated less by applications of force than by the consolidation of normalizing power, a situation reanimating Will's childhood sense of deflation in the wake of the Allied "victory." 'Hiroshima. Nagasaki. The atom bomb [...]. The Allies had become one with the forces they had fought against.'[150] This response reiterates the recurring theme in Dawson's fiction that to seek to oppose power on its own terms consolidates its triumph as an idea. As Foucault argues, 'the government of men [...] involves a certain type of rationality. It doesn't involve instrumental violence. Consequently [...] what has to be questioned is the form of rationality at stake.'[151] In the same vein, Fromm maintains that the defenders of the principle that "the ends justify the means" tend to fail to see that 'the use of destructive means has its own consequences which actually transform the end even if it is still retained

---

147 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 88
148 *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 129
149 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 46
150 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 95
151 Kritzman, p. 84

ideologically.'[152] In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* the flying bombs, representing "instrumental violence," fail to penetrate Will's "inner space." However victory, or more accurately the price that was paid for it, invades and dissolves his resistance. The ideological retention of the original "end" is sustained by the establishment of a normalized rationality, a phenomenon facilitated by power's dynamic structure. His loathing of this seemingly inexorable adjustment exacerbates Will's longing to be reunited with the currently inaccessible part of his remembered self that could fuse with and be redeemed by music. For music, which transcends all forms of rationality, is structurally impervious to the inroads of power and thus, unless a context is linguistically added, can neither be compromised by normalizing power nor dragooned into functioning as a means of its transmission.

Adorno attributes the liberatory potential of music to its 'shocks of incomprehension' that 'illuminate the meaningless world.'[153] In *A Field Of Scarlet Poppies* this capacity for defamiliarization is presented as a potential site of interstitial resistance to the cumulative acceptance conveyed through the metaphor of the inmates of the "Twilight Home for the Aged." In Will's mind it is also linked with youth and 'the innocent seeing eye getting in first before the intellect had placed the sounds or imposed pattern on them. Receiving things whole without too much interpretation.'[154] This sense of shock, which Josephine in *The Ha-Ha* experiences as a sense of the incongruity between what exists and what might so easily have existed instead, for Will transcends all context and only refers to itself. It is this that Skvorecky refers to when he defines the "message" of music as 'no more than this craving to communicate, to understand, to go all the way to the end [...] - the end of what? Of the

---

[152] *Man for Himself. An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, p. 195
[153] *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 133

world, heaven, life - possibly of truth.'[155] Paradoxically Will is tormented by the unattainability of this unattainability, even though the craving for it remains. He longs for Wersby, who taught him

> to accept the given without deforming it [...], an emptying of yourself before every encounter with music [...], to encounter the non-tangible good objectively as it was. A pure encounter which is not mine and cannot be made into mine [...]. He had taught you to wait on music as a religious waits on God. But the obsession was lost now, as though thieves had come in the night and stolen your virtue away, and now you wanted John Wersby back and he was dead.[156]

It is not that the awaited object has lost its allure, for its elusiveness is implicit in its nature. What has been lost is the ability to fully inhabit the feeling of reverence whose translation into experienced reality has been frozen by events, in spite of its retention as an idea.

Bettelheim's reference to Schopenhauer's assertion that one must wait patiently until art 'deigns to speak'[157] encapsulates both Will's conception of music and the feeling of impasse whose source is his awareness that his capacity to experience it has been internally blocked. He remembers having played in his youth 'as though a great flood of water at the top of a dam were bursting at you from the outside, and you were just a piece of machinery for refining it into sound.'[158] Now, however, he experiences himself no longer as a vehicle for but instead as an impediment to the sublimation of life into music. Not only can he no longer seem to activate its essence, he kills it in the translation, reducing it to the level of all that he once felt it could transcend. 'Your brain felt like two codeine tablets being rubbed together. There was ground glass on your fingertips [...]. You were playing your cello

---

154 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 87
155 *The Bass Saxophone*, p. 124
156 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 116-7
157 cited in Bettelheim, B., *Recollections and Reflections* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 148

like a sewing machine.'[159] The loss of the impulse of reverence is linked although not solely attributable to events unfolding in the wider social world. "'Vietnam keeps breaking into my music. Not in the fertile way that C.N.D. did. But as a cry of deadness and exile that music only increases.'"[160]

Pilger, among others, contends that in Vietnam, even more than in any previous war,

> atrocities were neither isolated nor aberrations. It was the *nature* of war that was atrocious; this was the "big story" of the war, but it was seldom judged to be "news" and therefore seldom told, except in fragments. Atrocities were reported as "mistakes" which were "blundered into." Behind this acceptable version appalling events could proceed as part of a deliberate and often efficiently executed strategy.[161]

This shift in the view of atrocities from the episodic to the structural informs Will's loss of vantage point in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. The invasion of his inner space, a recurring theme in the novel, is portrayed as synonymous with his loss of the ability to access and activate music's liberatory potential. Dawson implies that in the wake of the failure of C.N.D. his world has been rendered metaphorically radioactive by the applications of power which have normalized atrocities and operations of force. As Foucault argues, the normalizing drive "ideally" pre-empts even the thought of dissent so that no conceptual space for resistance remains.

Adorno explores the paradox that music's apparent assimilation of external impact masks its inviolability. 'What appears as the complete absorption of shock - the submission of music to the rhythmic blows dealt it from an external source - is in truth the obvious sign that the attempt at absorption has failed.'[162] Wersby, as

---

158 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 106
159 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 41-42
160 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 154
161 Pilger, p. 256
162 *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 157

presented in *Strawberry Boy* and reanimated in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, struggled as Will does to reconcile music with a more than just hypothetical sense of engagement with the world. In terms of his impact on the crises both within and between the members of the musical quartet, whose purpose and motivation is to interpret his composition, Wersby's spirit structurally energizes the novel. His symbolic presence is also sustained by Dawson's emphasis on the need for a sense of involvement whose source is the refusal to allow the normalizing drive of power to displace and subsume the interstitial. Wersby's superstructural fusion of hope, forgiveness and surprise places surprise last of all to intensify its significance, for hope and forgiveness which diverge from the predictable and subvert predictability, themselves enshrine the element of surprise.

George reanimates this theme in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* by explicitly opposing music to the totalizing tendencies of power. '"I just don't know what the answer is to power. Except music. Perhaps that is what Wersby is trying to say."'[163] Being outside language, music opens a conceptual space within and yet beyond the reach of normalizing power, forging an interstitial perspective that activates the same sense of shock and wonder that music itself encapsulates. Nancy's response to the Wersby composition, '"The sudden capsules of silence make you hear sounds as if for the first time,"'[164] is illuminated by Foucault's emphasis on the 'lightning flash' of transgression which gives such 'a dense and black intensity to the night it denies'[165] that nothing experienced afterwards can ever seem quite the same. This sense of defamiliarization, experienced to some degree by all of Dawson's protagonists, only in her later novels functions explicitly as a prerequisite for resistance rather than just a

---

[163] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 44
[164] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 44

source of alienation. For power, which is consolidated by the overlap of dialects of the normalizing drive, can be confounded only interstitially by a perspective that subverts the predictable. This is the phenomenon evoked by Rilke when he describes the sense of astonishment that everything can suddenly be 'so unexpectedly there.'[166]

The impact of the subversive element of surprise distinguishes music from the presence of the Bomb, suspended like the sword of Damocles over the world of the novel. The image of acquiescence with the inexorable expansion of the forcibly implanted "baby of the State" presents the complicity explored throughout Dawson's fiction as even more disturbing than the object of compliance. Similarly Will feels more oppressed by the widespread acceptance of the presence of the Bomb than he does by the actual horrors of war. This is the context in which Canetti asserts that

> weapons should be constructed in such a way that they frequently and unexpectedly turn against the man using them. Their terror is too one-sided. It is not enough that the enemy operate with the same means. The weapon itself ought to have a capricious and unpredictable life, and people ought to be more afraid of the dangerous thing in their hands than of the enemy.[167]

Like Dawson, Canetti rejects the rhetoric of deterrence and sees the "deterrent" as itself being the threat and not the means of deflection as which it is semantically constructed. His argument for weapons to contain an inbuilt "capriciousness" locates surprise as the only means of subverting the myths of inevitability by which the *status quo* sustains itself. In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* these myths are dramatized by the evocation of the ever-impending war whose outbreak paradoxically averts the sense of threat until the Cold War reactivates the paralysing atmosphere of dread.

---

165 *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, p. 33
166 *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, p. 67
167 *The Human Province*, p. 12

Will's feeling of oppression in the shadow of the Bomb is retrospectively counter-balanced by the defining event of his father's death which his mother claimed was of food-poisoning but which in Will's mind was suicide, a surprising and autonomous act, symbolically defying myths of inevitability. In the context of the novel the actual cause of death is irrelevant for, if " the suicide" deviates from "reality" in the form of a conscious or unconscious invention, if anything it seems more a part of Will's experience than it would have been if chance had inflicted it on him. The specificity of this event focuses and merges with a generalized urge for the "shedding of self," symbolized in his mind by the river that engulfed his father. Unlike music, however, this obliteration is an end in itself and permanent in its effects, not a means of transcendence of the constraints of identity and of the annihilation of the work of "man."

The novel's opening line, 'a pregnant day in mid-May when every green thing in the street seemed about to burst its boundaries,'[168] retrospectively signifies the lure of oblivion and presages the mutually scapegoating deadlocks of Will's marital impasse and creative or interpretative drought. 'The May green foliage seemed to be creeping nearer and nearer, whispering that it was coming to take you, and you must surrender to it.'[169] Throughout the novel, the surprise engendered by music counters the imagined invitation to follow his father, like an Isaac not only compliant but calling the shots. The hallucinated sensation of 'green [pressing] its flat hands lovingly against the panes. Flat hands, open hands, waiting for you'[170] is juxtaposed with the way that Julius plays, as if in defiance of the seductive inevitability

---

[168] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 1
[169] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 28

represented by the tide of "green." His 'playing was so transparent, so full of what he was interpreting that [...] he became nothing but a door opening on to a great encounter.'[171]

Although the lure of both music and oblivion are defined by an abdication of control, music, through the intervention of the subject, can activate an encounter where instead of being a vehicle of his own annihilation Will can become, paradoxically, a means of actualizing his self-transcendence. The word "encounter" has resonance because it connotes not only the hope of surmounting isolation but also the potential transcendence latent within the element of surprise. The Foucauldian emphasis on self-transformation ('Why should a painter work if he is not transformed by his own painting?'[172]) not only defines surprise as a potential activator of resistance but illuminates the point at which the ethical and the æsthetic intersect. This is the context of the Artist's rhetorical question in Zivkovic's fictional engagement with the impact of chance on individual lives: '"Isn't it actually uncertainty that makes life possible?"'[173] In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* it is this sense of uncertainty that Will feels he has lost. Everything seems preordained, from the rituals masking the death-throes of his marriage to society's adjustment to the Bomb. Music could subvert this constructed inevitability, but Will can no longer interpret the message that animates the Wersby composition.

In his youth his playing had been 'a struggle against the desert and emptiness and unmeaning that you felt all around you'[174] but the thought of napalm,

---

[170] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 40
[171] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 40
[172] quoted in Rabinow, P. (ed.), *Michel Foucault. Ethics. The Essential Works 1* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1997), p. 131
[173] Zivkovic, Z., *Time's Gifts*, trans. by Alice Copple-Tosic (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 70
[174] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 111

fragmentation bombs and, more to the point, the indifference which has paved the way for their conceptual triumph, has invalidated the struggle because the struggle of a puppet seems a charade. 'It seemed a barrier, their pain, that made further talk or thought or action impossible [...]. Let alone music.'[175] The horror however is not so much the atrocities themselves as the acquiescence symbolized by the acceptance of the placebos ('chewing gum for the children' and 'toys for the victims of napalm.'[176]) by means of which the pain is normalized. This derisory gesture of compensation, a diagnostic ruse of power, typically follows and trivializes operations of force as when, by means of the generative tendencies of power, Zay's uncle in *The Cold Country* induces the charade of gratitude when he produces the picnic moments after his rape of his niece. Operations of power, in their guise as the normalizing drive, produce such a psychological habit of collusion that refusal never even reaches the level of consciousness.

In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* Nancy's cynical formula for self-preservation from the full effects of the Bomb blurs distinctions between the general and the specific, the metaphorical and the actual: '"Lie down and camouflage yourself as a stick or a stone and you will survive."'[177] The normalizing drive, whose scapegoating of non-participants Dawson explores in *The Ha-Ha*, spares those metaphorically embodying the attributes of those whom the Bomb will also spare - the incurious, the homogenous, the passive and the psychically unevolved. These sticks and stones, as Will perceives them, are 'not the victims [...]. Nor were these the survivors. These were the victors in a new democracy, lying down and living in quiet terror.'[178]

---

[175] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 140
[176] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 141
[177] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 130
[178] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 136

Friedenberg, the Laingian critic, engages with this phenomenon in his analysis of the maintenance of "the group," where institutions so deflate the will of each recruit that rebellion is rendered literally inconceivable.[179] Both Foucault, in his analysis of the proliferation of pastoral power, and Szasz, in his exposure of the reality that underlies "benevolent" paternalism, demonstrate society's systematic acquisition of "institutional" characteristics. This tendency, which informs Dawson's fiction, is encapsulated in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* in Nancy's image of society as a Twilight Home for the Aged. This desensitization is further conveyed by the response to the campaign against the war in Vietnam. 'They stared at the leaflets and the pictures: "I've seen that one. I've seen it on the telly."'[180]

In his essay on the extent to which Orwell's prophetic vision of the tyranny of Newspeak has been realized, Chilton discusses the characteristic complacency in the face of anything filtered through this normalizing medium. The television, he argues, is 'regarded with almost superstitious respect: to have "seen it on the telly"' is considered by many 'to be a guarantee of factual truth.'[181] However this attitude contains an inherent paradox, for an inverse correlation exists between the awe inspired by the medium and the intensity of response provoked by the message. The mode of presentation of the atrocities in Vietnam reduce the war to the level of Orwell's "prolefeed," a situation encapsulated by Arendt's claim that the purpose of "totalitarianism" is to bring people to the point where they would 'at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and that nothing

---

[179] Friedenberg, p. 92

[180] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 148

[181] Chilton, P., "Newspeak: It's the Real Thing," in *'1984' in Nineteen Eighty-Four. Autonomy, Control & Communication*, p. 34

was true.'[182] It is in this context that Deleuze and Guattari contend that the welter of pseudo-communication that defines the age deprives us of resistance to the present. This phenomenon is illuminated by McLuhan's dictum that "the medium is the message," which emphasizes not only the dominance of the mode of conveyance over what it purports to convey but also the way that the medium dictates the reception of the message. This relationship structurally replicates that of power and knowledge where power, as content, is articulated through knowledge which provides its validation and its form. In other words, as Foucault demonstrates, the panopticization of the social consolidates the paradigm by increasing the momentum of the flow and exchange of operations of power. In his essay on television, Bettelheim develops McLuhan's premise by arguing that 'the problem is inherent in the medium. To hold viewers' attention, television programs have to simplify matters and cannot follow the arduous process required for a person to gain knowledge [...]. We should not expect of this medium what is contrary to its nature.'[183] It is the medium's inevitable over-simplifications and distortions that fuel Will's thirst for music in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*.

Although the Wersby composition, whose potential for transcendence he has lost the ability to interpret and experience, represents a rejection of inertia, his creative impasse reactivates the lure of oblivion that haunted his childhood before its displacement and transformation by music. Since surprise, the source of self-salvation, seems absent from every level of his life, time loses meaning until once again

> you are standing with your father [...]. And he is standing there beside his shoes weeping and then he is dead and calling to you from further down the river to come to him.

---

[182] Arendt, H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (George Allen & Unwin, 1966), p. 382
[183] Bettelheim, B., "Children and Television," in *Recollections and Reflections*, p. 154

> 'I have found it. It is here.' And the shadow of a necessary death hangs over you.[184]

Will associates this sense of necessity with a release from flailing like the crabs in Chapel Market for since he experiences consciousness as exile the prospect of extinguishing consciousness comes to symbolize an end to exile. The river functions to literalize the metaphor of a tide that will return him to his fantasized natural element of youth, before he was stranded by the fracture of intellect and emotion. However this literalization ontologically destroys the dream of release, not only because it negates its status as a dream but also because the vehicle and subject of salvation must by definition cease to exist. Even in childhood this surrender led not to solace but merely to an intensification of the sense of exile for which it masqueraded as a cure, a phenomenon informed by Bauman's contention that while each individual malady may be curable, the cure is only 'a subterfuge that is another malady.'[185]

Despite Will's self-justificatory contortions, projected escape from engagement and struggle can bring no release because the site of the hypothetical realization of this release is the site of the proposed annihilation.

> What comes at the end is not the flooding in of joy or of renewal and recuperation but of terror and exile, touching something that lies beyond subjectivity [...]. And then like the shadow of a bomber over all this green your father comes back and the shadow of a necessary death.[186]

The simile testifies to the constant conceptual presence of war which encapsulates the sense of dread, while Will's incantatory memories echo in the realm of form the call that seems to underlie their content.

> The green is winking at you now conspiratorially. The green gaze comes again. The water is deep and grey-green and moving only enough to take you peacefully after your father and out of exile. The shadow of a necessary death

---

184 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 48-9
185 *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 98
186 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 49

> has been with you ever since you were that child standing there by the river on the path to Happenden, Offenden, Bligh Woods and Pound Common.[187]

The wink, like that of the newscaster, represents the incitement to complicity, while the rhythmic repetition of the place names intensifies the dream-like feel of the urgent lure of non-being. As a child, Will made no bones about his ambition of suicide.

> "Will, dear" your mother had said. "Be sensible."
> You weren't unhappy at the time when you said it. You simply thought of the great trees of May spreading their leaves out to grasp you and take you into themselves. You saw in the far-off river a kind of fulfilment. It was your destiny to find your father there.[188]

'You were waiting like Isaac, waiting for Abraham to come and lead you away to the river altar.'[189] The river with its unalterable course is only conceptually eclipsed when in defiance of war and mortality Will begins to play. 'Happenden was taken from you and replaced by a simple Chorale Prelude.'[190]

When Adorno calls modern music 'a surviving message [...] from the shipwrecked,'[191] he distinguishes it from surrender as Will does in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. For music, being neither static nor preordained, is a testament to engagement and surprise. Illuminating the divergence of Saul's fate from Wersby's in *Strawberry Boy*, Adorno argues that 'all painting - even abstract - has its pathos in that which is; all music purports a becoming.'[192] For whereas Saul, mesmerized by the abstracts, has his pathos in "that which is" (his impasse being sustained by his internalization and hence perpetuation of constraint), Wersby, despite his subsequent suicide, dramatizes the theme of breakthrough and, as revealed in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, "purports a becoming" by exerting an impact on the future. It is in the light of its status as a

---

187 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 50
188 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 55-6
189 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 59
190 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 86-7
191 *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p. 133

becoming that music seems the only possible alternative to the tyranny of acceptance that defines Will's experience in the wake of the failure of C.N.D.. However, perceived retrospectively, his involvement in C.N.D. displaces music and functions temporarily as an authentic version of the misconstrued Kingdom of his childhood. 'The kingdom was no longer a place on a map [...]. You had, you thought, come through. To the real Kingdom, not the fantasy one.'[193] What Will fails to discern is that any Kingdom is by definition a fantasy one. '"The exile is real, and from it stems the fantasy of the Kingdom," Albert Camus has written.'[194] This authorial intervention, whose impact comes from its unexpectedness - a further example of content being reinforced by form - locates Will's crisis as symptomatic of a state of mind that can only be alleviated if stripped of its alluring veneer and exposed for what it is. Just as the hope and surprise that constitute the superstructure of Wersby's composition function as an antithesis to the Kingdom's implicit connotations of destiny (cast epistemologically as having by necessity already been attained), Wersby's scepticism is structurally opposed to Will's need for worship, surrender and belief. While, as Cioran argues, such scepticism has the potential to 'undermine fanaticism's purposes,'[195] Will must follow his fanaticism through before it can be demystified, deconstructed and finally overcome. For, as Foucault demonstrates, unless rejection is more than hypothetical, the underlying paradigm inevitably resurfaces, consolidated, in another form.

---

[192] *Philosophy of Modern Music*, p.191
[193] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 136
[194] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 60
[195] *A Short History of Decay*, p. 4

The Nietzschean contention that 'what is needed above all is an absolute skepticism toward all inherited concepts'[196] animates Foucault's analyses and defines the experience of all Dawson's protagonists. However it is only her later protagonists who experience this need on a fully conscious level. In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* these inherited concepts are symbolized by the sense of destiny represented by the river into which Will believes his father voluntarily disappeared. Whenever his mother mentioned her hope that he might become an accountant like his father, 'the great trees of the lane reared up at you and your father was standing by the river weeping beside his shoes.'[197]

Just as in *The Ha-Ha* Josephine hallucinates prehistoric creatures outside the Oxford colleges to counteract the sense of inevitability suffusing the plans of her fellow students, the image of the river with his father beside it comes to symbolize for Will the futility of struggle. However while Josephine's visions, which encapsulate the primacy of chance, evoke the same surprise that Wersby strove to attain through music, for Will the river represents the temptation to surrender to the delusion that to cease to be is synonymous with liberation from exile. In other words he hopes that death he will activate the loss of his loss and propel him from the platitudinous present into myth. His willing of the void as a means to obliterate his loss of purpose is illuminated by Nietzsche's adage that 'man would sooner have the void for his purpose than be void of purpose.'[198] However the fantasized liberation proceeds from a faulty premise since the Absolute by definition eludes human experience, a phenomenon summed up by Epicurus who observed that where we are, Death is not

---

196 Nietzsche, F., *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 409
197 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 55
198 Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p. 299

and where Death is, we are not. The metaphor of the crabs in Chapel Market jars, for Will, being human, lacks a "natural element" to which he could ever return. His feeling of displacement is so integral to his consciousness and to consciousness itself that its withdrawal would render him ontologically incapable of experiencing the fantasized suspension of exile.

> As a child, he was convinced that he 'belonged elsewhere' and was 'in exile here [...]. You had not come from her and the man who had been an accountant in the town a few miles away. Your memories were quite other.'[199] Ironically Will's receptiveness to music, a means of overcoming exile by building it interstitially into the structure of consciousness, springs from the same source as the sense of exile itself. Moreover, as Canetti argues, 'it is only in exile that one realizes to what an important degree the world has always been a world of exiles.'[200] This contention is echoed by Montale's prediction that 'tomorrow the most important voices will be those of the artists who, from their own isolation, echo the fatal isolation of each of us. In this sense only those who are isolated speak. Only the isolated communicate.'[201] The Wersby composition symbolizes the urge to transcend isolation and the sense of exile, not for the purpose of alleviating suffering but in the hope that "someone much better than you would take over where you had left off." This is what Wersby hopes for at the end of *Strawberry Boy* and what Will identifies at the end of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* as a reason for the rejection of despair. In the wake of the failure of C.N.D. the reactivation of this latent realization provokes and sustains his deferred longing for Wersby, a longing whose hopelessness is symbolically transferred onto the loss of his ability to interpret the composition.

---

199 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 58
200 *The Human Province*, p. 29

All Dawson's fiction structurally and by implication conceptually juxtaposes the ersatz communication of characters not fully aware of their own isolation with the fleeting moments of union and authentic exchange of those who are consciously "in exile." The intensity of this fantasized union, experienced mutually by Saul and Wersby in *Strawberry Boy* and by Will for Wersby as recalled in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, transcends the need for their simultaneous spatial and temporal presence and, as explored in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, even transcends the boundary of death. In *On the Marble Cliffs*, an allegory of totalitarianism, Juenger asserts that 'on this earth we may not count on seeing our work brought to completion, and he must be held fortunate whose resolve survives the struggle.'[202] A conceptual parallel links the political tyranny in Juenger's novel with the tyranny of "normality" underlying Dawson's fiction, portrayed as a perpetually self-consolidating force against which her protagonists are pitted. Although Wersby in *Strawberry Boy* could not have anticipated the reverberations of his composition, or even have foreseen that it would reverberate at all, his resolve, that transcends his suicide, animates Will's response to his music and all it comes to symbolize for him. For despite the ontological isolation of both these characters, Wersby who chronicles and preserves the sense of hope unwittingly recruits Will as its beneficiary - someone who could begin to assimilate it into his life. The fact that such a turn of events was unforeseeable dramatizes the sense of surprise that constitutes the message. Neither the Will fleetingly recalled by Wersby in *Strawberry Boy* nor Will as he perceives himself in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* exhibit identifiable potential to decipher or inhabit the composition's

---

[201] Montale, E., *Poet in Our Time*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyars, 1976), p. 57
[202] Juenger, E., *On The Marble Cliffs*, trans. by Stuart Hood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 111

animating charge. Yet the way he appears, even to himself, masks the dormant and unrecognized capacity for hope which is activated at the end of the novel.

The cumulative acceptance of the presence of the Bomb is a metaphor in Will's mind for the feeling of stagnation that defines his adult life. Although as a gesture of defiance against passivity the comradeship of C.N.D. averts them, Vietnam reactivates the mutually consolidating feelings of paralysis and exile. Donne defined life as a going out to the place of execution, to death, and Will, in common with Joanna in *Fowler's Snare* and with Zay and Miss Dicks in *The Cold Country*, until the end of the novel sees freedom as residing only in the choice of a mode of execution (a phenomenon informed by Chomsky's definition of the current state of "democracy" as 'free choice with a pistol to your head'[203]). In the realm of individual freedom, as explored in Dawson's fiction, this pistol tends to be conceptually internalized, displacing the potential for resistance. The bullets are hard to dodge since not only are they fired from within but their impact is experienced as a general force and not as a series of localized assaults. The most significant factor that distinguishes Dawson's "victims" from her characters who finally prevail is their awareness of the need for micropolitical resistance. Although in *The Cold Country* Zay chooses suicide, as does Miss Dicks by a more circuitous route, these "choices" parody the concept of freedom, since they merely pursue the trajectory established by the normalizing drive. As Chomsky contends, we inhabit a world of "democratized" power whose message 'is simple and straightforward. You are free to do what you want, as long as it is what we want you to do.'[204] Although Will's survival is purely accidental, it is characteristic of Dawson's later fiction that he should outlive his crisis to have to confront "the life of

---

[203] *Deterring Democracy*, p. 316
[204] *Deterring Democracy*, p. 347

a survivor." This distinguishes him from *The Ha-Ha*'s Josephine, suspended in the limbo of impending breakdown, *Fowler's Snare*'s Joanna who succumbs to surrender, *The Cold Country*'s Zay, swept from the page, and *Strawberry Boy*'s Saul, induced to complete the self-fulfilling prophecy that establishes the futility of revolt. Cioran's contention that the 'man who survives himself despises himself'[205] encapsulates the dilemma facing Will at the end of the novel. However Dawson implies that only when the self has been "survived" can self-contempt be overcome (just as only after breakdown can there be the possibility of breakthrough).

There is a tendency well-documented in explorations of trauma towards such a split between the self who experienced the "traumatic" state or event and the self who survives to tell the tale that the subject of the tale seems ontologically disconnected from its later manifestation as the teller. Spence contends that the way in which the past is formulated in the present crystallizes it arbitrarily and yet in such a way that 'the new description *becomes* the early memory.'[206] Conversely however it is Will's conceptualization of the present that is somewhat randomly realized through the image of his father's empty shoes. His need to validate his sense of defeat engenders a retroactive fiction whose recognition as such is a prerequisite for the realization that whether or not it is technically "true" is irrelevant, since what matters is to begin to move beyond it. Since the apex of Will's crisis is the convenient conviction that everything is beckoning him towards death, resistance and the hope of transcendence are subsumed by the constraints that produced them on the conceptual continuum on which resonate the metaphysical, the psychological, the personal, the political and the social. He wants to displace the evidence of his metaphorical death with an actual

---

205 *The Trouble with Being Born*, pp. 208-9

death, just as his metaphorical identification with the stranded crabs blends with the urge to literally submerge himself as he believes his father did.

> You thought of your past [...], of how your cello had converted your childhood's valley of shadows into a passion for life; of how you had transcended the presence of death. But now your mouth felt dry and your thoughts flew back to Happenden and Offenden and the tide rising in the river to take you.[207]

The lure of the river, no longer seen as menacing as it was before the sense of exile intervened to convert him into a puppet estranged from life, becomes a call of false escape that draws everything into itself and pre-emptively obstructs the interstitial. Even Wersby, the antithesis of the sense of reassurance and the inevitable, is spuriously transformed into a Pied Piper figure who shares the implied conspiratorial wink of both the newscaster and the tide of "green," symbolic of a self-willed death.

> The dazzling green volcanoes of the trees along the sides of the road comforted you. Perhaps the green would lift you up and take you if you turned your back on hope and waited in darkness [...], a haunting tune like a May morning hymn that suddenly goes wrong and turns itself inside out and into a wild pagan tune of endless surging prehistory.[208]

Against this projection of Will's despair, the composition's ontological superstructure struggles to reassert itself, 'its sudden silence encapsulated in the swordplay of the two violins.'[209] The reanimated sense of surprise and engagement that Will associates with early childhood is encapsulated in the swordplay metaphor which resonates with the swordfighting searchlights during the remembered bombing raids.

> His hallucination, auditory and visual, of the "haunting tune" of the "dazzling green volcanoes" fuses some of Dawson's most significant fictional themes. The sense of being oppressed by a flood of colour mirrors the perceptions of Josephine in

---

206 Spence, D. P., *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton & Co., 1982), p. 280
207 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 106
208 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 107

The Ha-Ha whose sensory and existential experience swings between extremes of intensity and numbness. In Josephine's case, however, the numbness is caused by E.C.T., administered by means of force and "justified" by the *status quo*'s articulation of normalizing power which covertly permits and complements the hospital's more identifiable assaults. This numbness is imposed to counteract the intensity with which the world's strangeness and randomness flood in, an intensity replicated when Will in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* feels hypnotized by the deluge of green, a sensation Ferguson echoes in *A Guard Within*, her stream of consciousness reconstruction of breakdown.

> The trees [...] started to tremble. I could see the vein and outline in every leaf [...] as though under a magnifying glass [...] and a petrified silence descended on me. Their minute detail grew and grew as though they were going to engulf me, and their colours shone and blazed before my eyes [...] in such threatening beauty.[210]

Hypnotized by all the "green," Will plays games with the memory of Wersby, conveniently forgetting that what Wersby left behind was the composition whose superstructure of hope, forgiveness and surprise represents a protest against the inevitability of death. Furthermore, for the musical quartet it functions as a symbol of the longing to surmount isolation.

The composition functions as the vehicle by means of which Will, George, Nancy and Julius try to break the impasse that threatens to block their receptiveness to Wersby's message from beyond the grave. Although Will genuflects at the shrine of Wersby's memory for his courage in having sublimated such a superstructure from within a social framework of oppressive inevitability, on the other hand Wersby, by dint of being dead, fuses with the welter of images that symbolize the extinguishing of

---

[209] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 107

[210] Ferguson, S. *A Guard Within* (London: Flamingo/ Fontana, 1987), p. 169

struggle. For Will ignores the fact that regardless of his superstructure death was something Wersby *chose* and talks himself into believing that the fact that Wersby has ceased to exist overrides both what he was and what he left behind. Will's confusion is contextualized by Lévi-Strauss's association of myth with 'the musical work,' since both are 'conductors of an orchestra whose audience becomes the silent performers' brought 'face to face with potential objects of which only the shadows are actualized.'[211] Although for Will the myth is the anticipated triumph of death while Wersby's composition is a symbol of defiance, their form, which is their shared nature as shadows, so blinds him to their content that they come to seem synonymous to him.

The "swordplay" of the violins, antithesis to the tide of green, symbolically becomes one with the swordplay of the searchlights since in neither case can the outcome be predicted and in each case music paradoxically seems able to transcend the world that brought it into being. Although like Ferguson in her account of breakdown Will experiences music as transcendent, its potential for transcendence implodes in times of despair into fusion with the oblivion it can potentially counteract.

> The only thing which enables me to go on is music. Without it, I would not have enough meaning in my heart to continue. What will I do when it comes to an end? But there is no end to music. I have thought about that and have been discovering its truth since I was sixteen. I used to try and follow a bar of music to its conclusion. Once I tried to die in order to find it. I could not find its end because it lies in the Absolute. And I am not allowed.[212]

The defining inaccessibility of the Absolute underlies Will's sense of exile in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. The confusion between the lure of oblivion and the Wersby composition stems from the sense of exclusion that both of them call to mind, one because of Will's sensations of paralysis and the other through its very ontological

---

[211] Lévi-Strauss, C., *The Raw And The Cooked*, trans. by John & Doreen Wightman (New York: Harper Row, 1969), pp. 18-19
[212] *A Guard Within*, p. 144

condition. 'Only you were excluded from this miraculous growth. Man thirsts and must die, though life is bursting [...] round him.'[213] The sense of threat implied by "May's burst artery" is contextualized by Doctorow's evocation of the 'maniac leer' of Spring. 'The whole earth was pushing up, everything was turning up and open,' exposing life 'as something that lived itself in you, an irresistible animating power that was mindless enough to go out of control, like the spring in a wind-up toy that without warning would run amok and bust itself to pieces.'[214] For Will the source of the sense of menace implicit in the green of Spring is the tendency of "nature" to provoke feelings of exile from the hope of exerting an impact on a world that seems beyond him and yet which paradoxically seems realized and animated only through his experience of it. Bochert also cites this phenomenon as the source of the loathing inspired by Spring. 'You stand there [...] with all your earthly desires, alone, with nowhere to go, and [...] you hate May, hate it in passion and love and despair.' [215]

Will confuses the lure of the river with what he strives to unearth in music as both focus his sense of estrangement, intensified as the feeling of impasse fails to block intimations of what it excludes. Only in the wake of breakdown at the end of the novel does he assimilate and begin to resolve the tensions within this ostensible antithesis. As Adorno argues, it is only the "spark" of art that can connect 'a self-alienated subjectivity turned in on itself' and reunite 'the subject with what philosophy once called the in-itself.'[216] However, paradoxically, 'to whoever remains strictly internal, art will not open its eyes.'[217] While only through music can the

---

213 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 120
214 *World's Fair*, p. 49
215 "In May, in May cried the cuckoo," in *The Man Outside*, trans. by David Porter (London: Calder & Boyars, 1966), p. 189
216 *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 288
217 *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 350

impasse be unblocked, the unblocking of the impasse is also a prerequisite for the activation of the revelation latent in music. Thus Will is groping in the dark but compelled towards the memory of light. His loss of the ability to play, which functions as a metaphor for his loss of the sense of communion, drives him to try to drown himself in the river whose "memory" haunts his present (or onto which he projects his present anguish in the form of a constructed memory). 'You treasured its promise.'[218] 'The clattering birds are calling you there [...]. And the sudden gaze penetrates you.'[219] Yet even the longing for death betrays a latent engagement with life, for its source is a paralysed rage against destruction, and the frustration born of the thwarted desire to access a superstructure of hope. For the thought of 'sixteen billion tons of T.N.T.' amplifies the 'cataclysmic green invitation,'[220] a phenomenon illuminated by Bernhard's contention that 'you can let the spirit wither [...], but not [...] the feeling for the spirit.'[221]

The assaults of the social world estrange Will from formulating an authentic response to them, though not from the urge to reoccupy an interstitial perspective from he could assimilate and potentially transcend them. However the ache of nostalgia functions in the novel as a pretext for evasion of the present. Only having re-emerged on the other side of breakdown can Will move on not only from his fixation with childhood and Wersby (as he retrospectively constructs them) but also from his compulsion to compare their intensity with the dryness and deadness of the present. This feeling of exile and alienation is one he tries to articulate by telling Nancy,

---

218 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 161
219 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 163
220 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 164
221 Bernhard, T. *On the Mountain*, trans. by Russell Stockman (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1993), p. 64

George and Julius, "'I've no feelings at all [...]. I feel like a flea."'[222] 'At each struggling little remark it was as though a cold hard stone had been dropped into the conviviality.'[223] However the simile also resonates with Josephine's metaphor for existence in *The Ha-Ha*, where she ontologically identifies her life with the purposeless journey of a fly. In both cases the prerequisite of breakthrough is the realization that this sensation constitutes the epistemological starting blocks and not the existential finishing line.

[222] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 173
[223] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 23

Breakthrough: Music's Liberatory Potential And The Activation Of The Interstitial

Challenging Bernhard's cynical contention that while 'everyone is a virtuoso on his own instrument' together 'they add up to an intolerable cacophony,'[224] the message of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* is an ultimately and paradoxically optimistic one, since here by implication the opposite is true. Hope is portrayed as residing in the potential for communion, as represented by the quartet's struggles to animate the final composition of John Wersby who dramatized in *Strawberry Boy* the paradox of ostensible isolation co-existing with an inner life of fantasized engagement with the world. However while the resolution of this uneasy alliance was enacted by Wersby only vicariously through music, Will, inspired by his memory, is faced with the challenge of integrating the hope of communion into a lived reality. Intimations of this possibility manifest themselves when the quartet play as one, instead of as an "intolerable cacophony" of mutually oblivious and therefore dissonant parts. Significantly only when they surmount their mutual mistrust and cease to be afraid 'of touching each other's souls and finding only salt there'[225] does the composition finally come to life. This phenomenon renders explicit the message implicit in Dawson's fiction: that the interstitial adjustment from suspicion and isolation to psychic proximity and hope, forgiveness and surprise has to precede the actual transformation.

> Your cello had come back to you. The A bloomed on your bow [...] like a murmur of reconciliation after a crime. Like grace and laughter instead of anger and retribution [...], a sudden theme of gratuitous joy. You felt your size come back. And the miracle of human hands working [...] to the final climax.[226]

---

[224] Bernhard, T., *Concrete*, trans. by David McLintock (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1984), p. 110
[225] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 172
[226] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 175

The mutually reinforcing sense of communion and the breathing of life into the Wersby composition are such that as the quartet play they inhabit the spirit from which the work derived. For just as the rejection of "retribution" in favour of "reconciliation" reanimates the superstructure's "hope and forgiveness," the sudden rush of "gratuitous joy" testifies to the miracle of "surprise."

However Will is tricked by his own thirst for communion whose consummation has been thwarted for so long. He seeks to prolong the moment, unaware that this will negate its essence as its artificial extension can only ontologically displace its "gratuity," since without pre-existing conflict nothing can exist to be "reconciled." Dostoyevsky, through Kirilov in *The Devils*, explores the sensation that Will, misconstruing it, is so desperate to sustain in Dawson's novel.

> It is not rapture, but just gladness. You forgive nothing because there is nothing to forgive. Nor do you really love anything - [...] it is much higher than love. What is so terrifying about it is that it is so terribly clear [...]. If it went on for more than five seconds, the soul could not endure it.[227]

Will, however, is so blinded by resentment at his barring from what Ferguson refers to as "the Absolute" that he tries in vain to circumvent his sense of exclusion through death. 'I need [...] a great river, a great tide, a great wave to run over me and drench me. Or a pill that would give me back my feeling of inner space.'[228] While his logic is impeccable self-referentially, its premise is built on delusion as it fails to acknowledge that if boundaries are lost, creating boundless "inner space," there ceases to be a subjective perspective from which to experience this liberating loss. However his journey gathers its own momentum. 'Words burst out from your head, a dark green May hæmorrhage [...] pouring from the trees.'[229]

---

[227] *The Devils*, p. 586
[228] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 178
[229] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 179

The projected siren song of the river, distorted interpretation of the Wersby composition, the metaphor through which he misconstrues the lure of non-being, 'came at you again and hit you with a blow that made you turn and look for some assailant [...]. It drove you [...] and drew you [...] to that place [...] that was not death, not nullity, not terminus, but fulfilment'[230] with 'a message [...] of finding, of completion.'[231] Will's desecration of Wersby's message operates and resonates on many different levels. "Completion" is the antithesis both of "hope" and of "surprise" since once the finishing line has symbolically been reached not only is there no longer anything either to fear or to hope for but the very act of completion implies a preordained path where surprise by definition plays no part. Concomitantly the suicide Will seeks gridlocks the transmission wires of "forgiveness," for no one who has ceased to exist can forgive either himself or anyone else. Finally curiosity (the thirst for "surprise"), perhaps the most persuasive impediment to suicide, is denied through the semantic contortions that draw a false conceptual distinction between "completion" and "terminus." Cooper contends that although the "right" to kill oneself must be absolute, suicide is 'always a mistaken path to transcendence.'[232] However Will, who equates non-being with an eternal continuation of the transcendence he associates with music, feels 'drunk from the call of the tune [...]. The daisies dazzled you [...]. You could hear the insects creaking [...]. The trees thrust down at you in loving suffocation.'[233]

Yet even the plan's enactment fails to resolve or ease the tension between the tug of annihilation and that of all that would have to be left behind. The sense of glory

---

230 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 180
231 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 181
232 *The Grammar of Living*, p. 145
233 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 184

Will associates with oblivion dissolves into bathos with the specificity of the reference to the means of his proposed obliteration. 'The Word was made green flesh and the Word sprang upon you [...]. The stars sprang about you, clawed down at you [...]. You were being drawn gently from exile to the Kingdom. You got out a bottle of nembutal capsules.'[234] By contrast the quotidian, as represented by Thelma, is elevated by its link with music, since both spring from the same source - that of life, or of the potential for life. 'She stood there with her arms open as if to say: '"Come to me. And the children. We are life. Even if it is only in a small way. And music is life."'[235] In an ironic twist, although the failure of the literal tide to lift him out of exile mirrors his rejection by the metaphorical tide ('Nothing was waiting to take you [...]. The birds screamed [...]. You hung there with bleeding hands'[236]), his survival, illustrative of the primacy of randomness and "surprise," represents a reunion with the spirit of the Wersby composition.

> You were not the sacrificial son. It came clearly the tune, but not from there. You felt only horror and disgust at the rearing up of nature [...]. You waited [...] for the world to have edges and boundaries again. For May's burst artery to be stemmed, her blood to be congealed.[237]

Will's change of heart reformulates the past, a phenomenon informed by the Foucauldian contention that contrary to the Freudian premise that past experience irrevocably shapes us we continually recodify and reconstitute the past to conform with the requirements of the present. In his work on the unconscious, Bollas argues that the passing of time 'is intrinsically traumatic.'[238] This contention casts light on the fact that only in the wake of breakdown does Will transcend his reliance on the

---

[234] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 185
[235] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 182
[236] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 187
[237] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 191
[238] Bollas, C., *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 119

cover-story of the magnet of the river that encapsulates but over-simplifies his sense of abandonment and exile. Laplanche and Pontalis locate the 'traumatic event' as the 'epitome of [...] unassimilated experience.'[239] However in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* it is rather that such experience is perceived through and projected onto the trauma of the paternal suicide that may or may not be fantasized but which functions as a symbol and a constituent of experience.

The novel's ending resonates with the theme of its opening sentence. The "pregnant day in mid May" when everything "seemed about to burst its boundaries" symbolizes the impending breakdown that produces the metaphorical hæmorrhage of green through which it is realized and in which the potential for breakthrough is latently contained. The coagulation of colour heals the rift, and the reunion of the world with its "edges" symbolizes the realization that only in the presence of limits can "inner space" be inhabited or felt. Furthermore the "pregnancy" metaphor functions as a conceptual alternative to the complicit resignation evoked by the response to the expansion of the "baby of the State." Like Josephine's in *The Ha-Ha*, Will's transformation is both precipitated by and articulated through the epiphanic realization that human contact and authentic exchange can defy the preordained. Still blurred from Nembutal, he is asked for a cigarette by someone who looms unexpectedly out of the world. 'You opened your packet. Your hands were your own again [...]. "I'll give you one if you tell me something."

"And what is it you want to know?"

---

[239] Laplanche, J. & J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press & the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1973), p. 112

"Anything. Just anything."'[240] The sensation of reinhabiting himself and "feeling his size coming back" is reinforced when the quartet play, together performing the "miracle of human hands working," free from suspicion and mistrust.

Dawson contrasts this unexpected communion with the stifling forays of mutual invasion routinely performed by Will and Thelma. Will's state of mind and experience of his life for most of the novel is encapsulated by the anguished question posed in Bochert's "The Dream," 'Have I no right to my suicide? Shall I go on murdering and being murdered?'[241] The destructive dynamic of his marriage to Thelma recalls Joanna's parents in *Fowler's Snare* by developing the theme of the schizophrenogenic double-bind. However Dawson's fictional perspective shifts from the simple presentation of destructive and mutually-destructive characters by whom her protagonists are oppressed (and in relation to whom through internalization they come to impose their own oppression) to an engagement with the contextual intelligibility of the dynamic. By exposing the fragility of the line dividing victim and aggressor, this transition to implied identification extends the theme of forgiveness to one that operates not just at the level of content but also that of form.

The interaction between Will and Thelma is characterized by an unremitting mutual surveillance which Will feels invading his inner space. The paradoxical inverse correlation proposed by Laing between a position's untenability and the ease of its abandonment casts light on the predicament in which he finds himself. The impasse of perpetual pre-emptive defensive attack has produced a situation illuminated by Cioran's contention that 'there is life only in the inattention to life.'[242]

---

[240] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 198
[241] Bochert, W., "The Dream," in *The Man Outside*, p. 131
[242] *A Short History of Decay*, p. 164

Only at the end of the novel does Will come to realize the truth of this proposition, his shift in perspective signified by his transformed perception of the metaphorical tide. Instead of putting his life on hold to focus exclusively on the places where the fantasy tide seems likely to materialize, 'you would wait secretly and without attention for the waters to creep up on you from behind, unexpectedly, when you had given up waiting for them, [...] gratuitously, unearned, through no virtue of your own.'[243] Amos Oz explores this perspective in his assertion that there is 'no finer thing' than to hope 'for a recurrence of one of those rare, unexpected moments when the blackness is momentarily illuminated, and there comes a flicker, a furtive glimmer which one must not miss, one must not be caught off guard.'[244] His reference to the glimmer's "furtiveness" mirrors Will's emphasis on the "secrecy" of waiting, which instead of displacing life must be assimilated into its very structure.

Foucault asks rhetorically, 'what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself'?[245] This question, which informs Will's epiphanic realization that the source of breakthrough is an acceptance of its randomness, implies that unpredictability is the factor that causes such a revelation to fall outside the auspices of conventional notions of "knowledge." It is likewise the long-awaited falling of the scales from his eyes that leads him to "stray afield" of the self that the tyranny of the habitual had paralysed and exiled from itself. As Julius remarks when Will returns dazed and drenched from the river, '"I would never think of suicide just because it's all so strange and inventive

---

243 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 199

244 Oz, A., *To Know A Woman*, trans. by Nicholas de Lange (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 265

245 Foucault, M. , *The Uses of Pleasure*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 8-9

and perilous and miraculous.'" [246] '"Life is too accidental, Will, too strange, too chancy, too might-not-have-been to die before one's time."'[247] Yet Dawson implies that the meaning underlying this assertion can only be freed from the remove of the hypothetical when life is or has been under identifiable threat. This phenomenon is illustrated by the fact that Will is exhilarated by the flying bombs but reduced to paralysis by the spurious "protection" of the Bomb.

His rejection of the image of his parents as filiocides, and his recognition that the lure of oblivion underlying the tune in his head symbolizes not destiny but simply the 'irreducible sense of early loss and separation and exile,'[248] represent his liberation from the false explanations that ontologically replicate the slogans of the normalizing drive. This liberation signifies the triumph of surprise, while his rejection of blame and his acceptance that the tide will come in its own time and of its own accord dramatize the triumph of forgiveness. Music, like death, should be the 'unexpected guest'[249] whose activation can be neither foreseen nor controlled. Moreover although Will scapegoats the failure of C.N.D. for his sense of unreality and exile, the gesture of suicide can have no effect on the prospect of humanity's extinction. His epiphanic moments in the novel are illuminated by Montale's contention that what animates the artist is the 'presentiment of a form which he will only know when it has been attained.'[250] The source of Will's torment is his inability to discern a means of transforming his "presentiments" into a realization of what they signify. Yet the irony, and the paradox, as Montale clarifies, is that only through the miracle transformation itself can the means of its genesis be revealed. This is the context in which Will muses

---

[246] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 194
[247] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 195
[248] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 201
[249] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 201

that '"there are places in the heart which do not yet exist and into them we must enter suffering in order that they may have their existence..." Perhaps you would play to give them existence, [...] burning through to an inner combustion and a coda to the Wersby tune.'[251]

The Foucauldian distinction of the function of philosophy, 'to let us see what we see,' from the rôle of science, 'to reveal what we do not see,' [252] informs Will's shift of allegiance from paralysis and self-contempt to energy and hope. His emergence on the other side of the bungled lunge for oblivion activates his long-dormant sense of urgency. When Julius, unfazed by Will's abortive appointment with death, enquires, '"So did you find what you set off to find?"

You shook your head. "I thought you wouldn't. The real call only comes when the answer is already there."'[253] Montale's caveat that the "presentiment of a form" is no guarantee that a form will in fact emerge informs what Julius implies - that the mere premonition of an answer is no guarantee of the imminent transformation of these intimations into a lived reality. If Will is to find an answer, it can only be the realization that what he thought was lost was nothing external to himself but simply his resolve to reach out into the void for it. By misconstruing the nature of boundaries, his obsession with inner space makes him long to be done with them and overflow into formless non-being like the erupting green volcanoes that in his mind cease to exist as separate branches and trees. Yet, as Svevo contends about existence,

> one did not need to get outside it in order to realize how fantastically it was put together. One need only remind oneself of all that we men expect from life

---

250 *Poet in Our Time*, p. 68

251 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 201

252 quoted in Davidson, A. I. (ed.), *Foucault and his Interlocutors*, p. 2

253 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 194

> to see how very strange it is, and to arrive at the conclusion that man has found his way into it by mistake and does not really belong there.[254]

This perspective informs the world of the novel not only by emphasizing the interstitial perspective but also by challenging the presumed negativity of exile.

Deleuze and Guattari credit Spinoza with being the only philosopher to have understood that freedom can only exist within immanence and that immanence is immanent only to itself. They thus consider him the only philosopher 'never to have compromised with transcendence.'[255] This alone, they maintain, is the fulfilment of philosophy as only this satisfies its prephilosophical presupposition. Immanence, as they understand it, is the

> breath that suffuses all the separate parts, [...] the absolute horizon [of events], independent of any observer, [...] the indivisible milieu in which concepts are distributed without breaking up its continuity or integrity [...]. The only regions of the plane are the concepts themselves, but the plane is all that holds them together.[256]

By seeking to sublimate and isolate music, Will in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* misconstrues the ontological premise of this plane of immanence. In the aftermath of his resulting failure, he dramatizes the phenomenon explored throughout Dawson's fiction of the futility of any alteration of the content if its structural foundations are retained. For while his exchange of the Absolute of music for the Absolute of death leaves the equation unchanged, death, by negating the experience of the equation, would (unlike music) have negated the experience of its transcendence. Deleuze and Guattari demonstrate that paradoxically what constitutes the immanent is the coexistence of its constituent concepts. Only when Will has grasped this idea can his breakdown be transformed into a breakthrough, so that instead of trying to isolate the

---

254 Svevo, I., *Confessions of Zeno*, trans. by Beryl de Zoete (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 291
255 *What is Philosophy?*, p. 48
256 *What is Philosophy?*, p. 36

sublime from the pedestrian he sees that in accordance with Kierkegaard's contention it is latent within the pedestrian that the sublime in fact resides.

George embodies this Kierkegaardian perspective, and *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* ends with him and Will experiencing it.

> "Life is too serious for [suicide], Will,"' he says. '"There's a time for mourning and a time to return to the living [...]. Join me," he cried. You hesitated [...]. But the cello is replying with a nostalgic [...] wry [...] "If it were so." He is searching for the places he will never reach but which he must continue to search for, yearning. And he throws them away when they come, the promises, the hopes [...]. "Get out your cello, Will. It's all so unaccountable. Coming from nowhere and going only to its own ordered ends."[257]

The call "If it were so" recaptures for Will in adulthood the 'high white promises' of his childhood that would 'descend on you tinged with sadness.'[258] The return of his "inner space" unblocks the "unreachable places," or the intimations of them, which is after all what they are. "If it were so," the implicit message of art, encapsulates its inherent paradoxical affirmation, for "art" hypothesizes that "what is not, is" (by dint of the fact that imaginatively it *can* be). Will's feeling of impasse, perceived through the construct of nostalgia, represents a yearning to heal the fracture of emotion and intellect that desensitized him to the horrors of the times and paralysed him by his failure to do justice to other people's pain. Only through art can he experience the return of what was lost, or of what was perceived as having been lost (in the sense of being perceived as having existed).

Here the rôle of music is illuminated by Foucault's definition of the function of writing. 'Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind... It is primarily concerned with creating an opening

---

[257] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 202
[258] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 55

where the writing subject endlessly disappears.'[259] As Will and George play at the end of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* their identities are subsumed by the miracle of the dynamic of breathing life into the Wersby composition and of feeling life breathed into them by it. The Bomb is not forgotten, but over and around it is built Wersby's "superstructure of hope and forgiveness and surprise." As Skvorecky argues, 'when the lives of individuals and communities are controlled by powers that themselves remain uncontrolled - [...] then creative energy becomes a protest.'[260] The homage paid by George and Will functions as a realization of what Dawson portrays as the hope of every artist and exile, that someone would come after you and "take over where you had left off." Bochert contends that 'our disappearance, our dissolution, our not-being is certain, noted down ineffaceably - our not-being-here-anymore is directly at hand, yet: we are. We still are. We have the incomprehensible courage to be.'[261] The choice of the second person plural rather than singular implicitly attests that the source of the incomprehensible "courage to be" is the impulse to surmount isolation. Will's experience challenges the Laingian definition of art as a vain "reaching out" to 'a world that will remain as unmoved as it is avid.'[262] For it is only as his "avidity" is displaced by surprise that the impasse of his obsession with Wersby is overcome and he reclaims his capacity to be "moved." The rôle of music in the novel is also informed by Kafka's view of literature's ideal function.

> If the book we are reading does not wake us, as with a fist hammering on our skull, why then do we read it? So that it shall make us happy? Good God, we would also be happy if we had no books and such books as make us happy we could, if need be, write ourselves. But what we must have are those books that

---

[259] Foucault, M., "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, p. 116

[260] foreword to *The Bass Saxophone*, p. 7

[261] "Conversation over the roofs," in *The Man Outside*, p. 32

[262] *The Politics of Experience*, p. 152

> come upon us like ill-fortune, and distress us deeply [...], like suicide. A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us.[263]

At the beginning of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* Will asks rhetorically, "'Who cares about happiness?'"[264] and, as the novel unfolds, Wersby's tune acquires an increasing urgency. A symbol of its own elusiveness, it "distresses" him so deeply that it drives him to the brink of death but ultimately fulfils its function of breaking the ice of the "frozen sea" inside him. In this respect its purpose is informed by Foucault's view of his writings as a set of tools which in not necessarily foreseeable combinations could unlock new possibilities for thought.

Montale's premise that "only the isolated communicate," which illuminates the spirit that produced and suffuses the Wersby composition, also informs the implied link that exists between writing and music. In *Seminar on Youth* Aldo Busi concludes that his motivation for writing is 'to find an addressee. Or the sender.'[265] In the same way in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, just as it was only through composing that Wersby could locate - by creating - a "sender," only through the rejection of distortion (the transformation of Wersby into a tantalizing symbol of death) does Will reconstruct himself as a worthy "addressee." The essence of the message is not altered or compromised by the fact that the dialects never fully coincide.

The intertextual resonances of *Strawberry Boy* and *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* reinforce their thematic content in the form of Dawson's fictional evolution. For while Will and Wersby reach similar conclusions about the need for communion and the hope contained in surprise, Will's attempt at suicide fails while Wersby's was a "success". This randomness implies intimations of redemption, for Will's "failure"

---

263 Kafka, cited in "To Civilize Our Gentlemen," in *Language and Silence*, p. 88
264 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 30
265 *Seminar on Youth*, p. 62

means that he lives to interpret the Wersby composition in the way it was intended to be played. Thus viewed retrospectively Wersby's life was not in vain, even though he could never have known that this would be the case. Montale contends that a work of art is "a gesture" which it is up to the artist to 'perform' and then leave 'in mid-air. It is up to the user to identify it and make it his own.'[266] In *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* Wersby's "gesture" is finally inhabited as he never fully managed to inhabit it himself.

So, whereas for Wersby communion remained an ideal, for Will and George it becomes a reality as the spaces in their togetherness animate the equation of hope and forgiveness and surprise. Bauman defines the chief diagnostic of "play" as the absence of anything that

> accrues (except the skills of the player, or his fatigue, or his enthusiasm, or his boredom) [...]. Each new play is an *absolute beginning* [...]. One may say that play, unlike "real reality," is a Markov *process*, not a Markov chain: the probability of reaching some future state depends solely on the present state, not on the past events that led to it [...]. Play has no lasting effects; it does not [...] spawn obligations [...]. Each play sets its own rules. Play *is* the rules: play has no other existence but a number of players observing rules.[267]

Thus "play" functions as the antithesis to power which, as Foucault demonstrates through his analysis of the sites where it exerts its effects, is generative and accrues by definition. Power, as a productive dynamic, consolidates itself by inducing each component of the social to collude in the transmission of its charge. Power is cumulative because it "comes from everywhere" and although its points of genesis are legion it lacks any "absolute beginning." Moreover the ontological basis of power, articulated in the normalizing drive, is its tendency to "spawn obligations." As Dawson explores in her fiction, and as Foucault demonstrates through his analyses, the group is maintained both conceptually and actually by an internalization of the

---

[266] *Poet in our Time*, p. 25
[267] *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 171

panoptical society where the idea of vested interest incites each social subject to identify with the construct of consensus. However at the end of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, Will creates and activates an interstitial space and sublimates Wersby's "milkman's whistle" from the noise of the "public execution."

Will is symbolically reunited with Wersby when he experiences the hope that was the composition's genesis. Dramatizing Marcuse's assertion that 'the accomplished work of art perpetuates the memory of the moment of gratification,' [268] Will transforms the memory into a reality in which its essence is preserved. Derrida discusses the 'interminable unhappiness of the disciple' which 'perhaps stems from the fact that he does not yet know - or is still concealing from himself - that the master, like real life, may always be absent.'[269] Only at the end of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* does Will emerge from his rôle as disciple, caught in the deadlock of the abortive act of prayer, and claim his experience as his own. Both the origin and enactment of the transformation dramatize the hope of communion whose symbol is the sound of the milkman's whistle.

Montale's contention that the "true artist" is he who 'hears noises in the street and performs the selective gesture of isolating, in that chaos, one moment or one detail which might provide a quiver of vital emotion'[270] uncannily captures the superstructure of Wersby's composition. The "milkman's whistle," the symbol of hope, forgiveness and surprise, is not located in a realm *beyond* the chaos of normalized horror; rather it derives its potency from being ontologically inextricable from it. Fantasies of suicide can therefore never be the answer since the answer, if one

---

[268] Marcuse, H., *The Æsthetic Dimension: Towards A Critique of Marxist Æsthetic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 64

[269] Derrida, J., "Cogito and the History of Madness," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 37

exists at all, resides in the rejection of the obsessive search for one. The sound of the whistle can never displace the noise of the public execution; instead it is heard within, despite and in defiance of it, symbolizing a paradoxical affirmation of life. Bochert's assertion that 'into the nothingness we must again build a Yes'[271] is contextualized by Adorno's contention that since each tone within music is determined by the construction of the work in its entirety, the distinction between "the essential and the coincidental" disappears' and that the 'abstract division of the universal and the particular' therefore renders 'artworks null and void.'[272] What Wersby achieved, and what outlasts him, is the way he implied the existence of universality *within* the particular by sublimating, from within the universal, the particular's inviolability. It is this that Will experiences with George when the suffocating "intimacy" of his marriage has fallen away. On his return from the river, he finds that Thelma has exchanged him for Julius so, although like his failure to die this turn of events was beyond his control, he is freed from the impasse and flung into the vertigo of breakthrough.

As music is revealed not as something beyond communion but as a means of attaining and celebrating it, engagement with the unforeseeability of life displaces the construct of presumed inevitability that underlies the normalizing drive. This is why Adorno's arguments inform the world of the novel, for his claim that music "purports a becoming" testifies to the lure of the possible experienced as the sense of "shock" integral to defamiliarization. It is in this context that Foucault, who sought to defamiliarize the workings of power, claimed that had he encountered the Frankfurt School when young he 'would have been seduced to the point of doing nothing else in

---

270 *Poet in Our Time*, p. 53
271 "This is our Manifesto," in *The Man Outside*, p. 250

life but the job of commenting on them.'[273] He asserts that despite the stigmatization of curiosity, for him

> it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up the familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things; a fervor to grasp what is happening and what passes; a casualness in regard to traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential. I dream of a new age of curiosity.[274]

Curiosity functions as the vehicle of Will's salvation in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, just as it was did for Josephine in *The Ha-Ha*. The "milkman's whistle" heard in its startling singularity collapses distinctions between the coincidental and the essential, and the breakthrough represented by the sense of "becoming" displaces the undertow of the metaphorical river and shatters the pillar of salt he had become. Will finally experiences the meaning of the words of the speaker on the Aldermaston march: "'Will people at last refuse to identify themselves with a race or a history or a class, and instead with humanity... the fascination for extinction... The lack of wonder and love for life... The ability to accept only a doomed, sealed future...'"[275] A theme alluded to throughout Dawson's fiction surfaces explicitly in the message that the defining inherited slogans of group protest can only have meaning if the conviction for which these slogans substitute precedes and informs them, rather than relying on them as its proxies.

Will remembers whining to Wersby, "'Modern music has no fecundity. It has no tendrils. Nothing clings to it. That's why it's so hard to memorise,'" to which he replied, "'That's you. Not the music." You remembered the words as you crossed

---

[272] *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 189
[273] *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, pp. 119-20
[274] in *Le Monde*, April 6, 1980, reprinted in Lotringer, S. (ed.), *Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), pp. 198-99
[275] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 125

Cafford Square more than fifteen years later.'[276] Wersby's mistrust of "bombast and rhetoric" informs his composition which rejects propaganda and the paternalistic tendency to manipulate the listener or interpreter's response. Against the clamour of the public execution, it is up to whoever comes after him to create and embody the nature of the tendrils. The bond with George, attained and celebrated through their interpretation of the composition, embodies the liberatory potential contained within the unexpected. The intensity of the discovery derives from its unforeseeableness, distinguishing it from the deadlock of Will and Thelma's marriage.

Huxley's contention 'propinquity is never fusion'[277] illuminates the world of the novel, since Will's epiphanic realization that to seek to fuse with the Absolute is synonymous with surrender is mirrored by his realization that he and Thelma have so become one, equally locked in an untenable situation, that inevitably they stifle one another. Not even as atavisms have their mutual feelings retained any vestige of what generated them. However the shock of propinquity symbolizes liberation from the double-bind of their metaphorically cannibalistic fusion. The "milkman's whistle" displaces the flood of green, and the synergetic immersion in the unknown enacted by Will and George replaces the impasse of the predictable, symbolized by the dynamic of Will and Thelma. This "surprise," that forges a space for "forgiveness," signals a transition from the expectation of limitless communion, negated and overlain by stratagems, to the acknowledgement of boundaries that demarcate the potential for candour and "hope." This transition is illuminated by Canetti's contention that 'one always puts one's hopes in the wrong people, and if one knew it, one could not live another moment. Luckily, there are always others, to whom one was so innocent that

---

276 *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 114

277 Huxley, A. *After Many a Summer* (New York: The Vanguard Library, 1953), p. 170

one did not even place hope in them. Thus life goes on, along unexpected [...] paths.'[278] Will and Thelma's mutual reliance, corrupted into mutual suffocation and resentment, exemplifies the first part of Canetti's claim, while the sudden feeling of kinship that Will attains with George encapsulates its coda, illustrative of the kernel of redemption latently contained within surprise.

The Upstairs People, Dawson's novel of 1988, further explores the connection between the general sense of astonishment that things should be as they are (and that in Heidegger's words there should be something instead of nothing) and the specific sense of astonishment arising from life's potential and ultimate unknowability. 'Where there might have been nothing but chunks of raw stone and wasps, there was love and music and a mysterious wind blowing round people and coming from afar.'[279] In other words Wittgenstein's argument in *Tractatus*, that not *how* the world is, but *that* it is, is the mystical, provokes the sudden awareness of the miracle of proximity. As Will and George play in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, they inhabit the kind of friendship Simone Weil describes as miraculously 'unsoiled by the wish to please or the opposite wish to dominate.'[280] Bauman equates this proximity with

> neither a distance bridged nor a distance demanding to be bridged; not a preambula to identification and merger, which can, in practice, only be an act of swallowing and absorption. Proximity is satisfied with being what it is - proximity. And is prepared to remain such: the state of permanent attention, come what may.[281]

This miracle of proximity is what Will indirectly learns from Wersby, rejecting the desecrating eye of desire and instead "waiting on music as a religious waits on God," without demands or expectations but celebrating intimations of His presence (or of

---

278 *The Human Province*, p. 181
279 Dawson, J., *The Upstairs People* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 42
280 cited in Dilman, I., *Love and Human Separateness* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987), p. 74
281 *Postmodern Ethics*, p. 88

His potential or metaphorical presence, which is arguably what such presence means).

It is in this context that Hesse observes that for two people to

> exchange ideas with one another and in doing so remain constantly aware of the fragility of their tools, the ambiguity of all words, the impossibility of truly precise expression [...] occurs so dreadfully seldom that we inwardly rejoice at any approximation to it, any even partial realization of it.[282]

Almost wordlessly, Will and George attain this approximation and their rejoicing springs from the reconciliation of human contact and the message of the music, which fleetingly merge and are one.

Connolly argues that the reconciliation of serenity and fanaticism is, or should be, humanity's ultimate goal and yet that 'either one, taken alone, is disastrous.' He contends that except 'through the integration of these two opposites, there can be no great art and no profound happiness - and what else is worth having? For nothing can be accomplished without fanaticism and without serenity nothing can be enjoyed.'[283]

The close of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* dramatizes this fragile and ephemeral integration, illustrating the Laingian view of the breakthrough that can come in the wake of breakdown. Serenity born of too tepid a zeal can only be a misnomer, for only the serenity whose source is the aftermath of breakdown's fanaticism can truly be inhabited and felt. At the end of the novel, the healing of the fracture of intellect and emotion embodies what for Hesse is the 'highest spiritual experience,' the 'reconciliation between reason and reverence, a recognition that the great contradictions are one and the same.'[284]

The final image of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* visually reformulates the auditory one of the "milkman's whistle" in *Strawberry Boy*. In both cases, the triumph

---

[282] Hesse, H., "A Guest at the Spa," in *Autobiographical Writings*, trans. by Denver Lindley (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1972), p. 85

[283] *The Unquiet Grave*, p. 155

of hope, forgiveness and surprise is reinforced by the symbolism that resonates through the structure of the novel. For in each case the protagonist leaves behind an image at odds with and transcending the portrayal of his inner and outer life. While in no way denying or detracting from the sense of exile that underlies the novel, these mutually reinforcing metaphors fuse the essential and the coincidental, the superstructural and the interstitial. The "if it were so" is conveyed by Will's sudden recollection of how as a child

> you had quite deliberately knocked a jar of red paint over the kitchen table [...] and watched the red pool blaze and spread, [...] gazing fascinated at what you had done, and seeing how many different directions it would flow into [...]. You had done it simply as play, simply to see the miraculous bloom rearing out till it became a huge billowing poppy. Just to see how it would take itself. Just to see how it would spread. "Let it last. Let it last" you had cried to yourself as you stared at it. Just to see what could be done with this great scarlet poppy, waiting till it became a field of poppies waving in a gentle wind [...]. "Let it never stop" you cried to yourself, picking up your bow. "Art is always partly play" George sang as he played, and the field of scarlet poppies swayed and bloomed in your mind.[285]

Huizinger defines play as a manifestation of 'the unity and indivisibility of belief and disbelief, the indissoluble connection between sacred seriousness and pretence and "fun."'[286] George's emphasis on this implicit diagnostic of art echoes the message of the composition itself. The public execution and the milkman's whistle are not mutually compromised and neither are they superimposed in alternating layers. Rather they interpenetrate each other, confounding distinctions between heterogeneity and synthesis, intervention and assimilation. Adorno's praise of those works that 'neither mask the divergent or antagonistic nor leave it unreconciled'[287] illuminates the

---

[284] Hesse, H., A Bit of Theology," in *My Belief*, p. 199
[285] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 202-03
[286] Huizinger, J., *Homo Ludens*, cited in *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 318
[287] *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 190

realization that dawns on Will and Wersby that the unreconciled and irreconcilable must implicitly ontologically incorporate the urge towards reconciliation.

The infinite possibilities of direction conveyed by the image of the sudden rush of paint encapsulate the sense of surprise that unblocks the impasse symbolized by the Bomb and by the deadlock of the double bind with Thelma. Furthermore the paradox of the disparity and the concomitant connection between the gesture's deliberateness and the unexpected field of scarlet poppies it unleashes enacts the message of the Wersby composition which he left for the future to interpret and to be interpreted by. This is the context in which Breton's assertion that a work of art is valuable only in so far as it is 'vibrated by the reflexes of the future'[288] informs the world of the novel. Not only does Wersby's composition structure a future he could never have envisaged, it functions as a medium and also as a metaphor for what its interpreters cannot otherwise articulate and the means of their transcendence of this inarticulacy. In acquiring a life of its own, the composition is "vibrated" by the reflexes it shapes and activates, a phenomenon informed by Freud's contention that 'the work proceeds as it can, and often presents itself to the author as something independent or even alien.'[289] The "miraculous bloom" of the paint is illuminated by the emphasis Foucault placed on 'work on our limits, that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty.'[290] The intimations of release and surprise evoked by the unforeseeable patterns of the paint are informed by the Foucauldian

---

[288] quoted in Benjamin, W., "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1992), p. 242
[289] Freud, S., *Moses and Monotheism. The Complete Psychological Writings of Sigmund Freud. Volume 23* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 104
[290] "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 50

understanding of freedom as 'not the end of a liberation struggle, but the condition from which it derives and the question it poses.'[291]

The phenomenon of the explosion of paint alludes to the paradox of intentionality, for the gesture's form (its deliberateness) does not dictate its resulting content in terms of the nature of its outcome. This divergence of intention and outcome unblocks the impasse of the paralysis engendered by the tyranny of the predictable, encapsulated by the image of "unsuccessful love-making" and symbolized by the gradual compliance with the expansion of the "baby of the State." The exhilaration stems from the sense of the possible conveyed by the feeling of "if it were so," a variation of 'that might-have been' which Faulkner considered 'the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality.'[292] Adorno defines life as 'nothing but what shudders, the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell. Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness.'[293] As Wersby's composition comes to life, Will transcends the reification of his consciousness, finally ceasing to perceive himself as a puppet, and experiences the poppies being reanimated by the absolute "unaccountability" of life as it proceeds unforeseeably to its unknowable "ordered ends." Unlike the river, symbol of defeat, whose preordained and linear course is that of least resistance, the impact of the burst of paint derives from its defiant and untrammelled multiplicity.

The novel's prolegomenon is taken from Camus: 'I know from my own experience that a man's life is nothing but a long journey to find again, by all the detours of art, the two or three powerful images upon which his whole being opened

---

[291] Rajchman, J., *Truth and Eros. Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991), p. 113

[292] Faulkner, W., *Absalom, Absalom* (London: Random House, 1995), p. 150

[293] *Æsthetic Theory*, p. 331

for the first time.' Reinforcing Camus' claim, Bernhard describes the phenomenon where

> suddenly there's an idea and it demands realization, our entire life, our entire existence consists only of such ideas demanding realization, once this process breaks off, our life breaks off, we're dead. We consist of nothing but ideas that surface inside us and that we want to realize, that we must realize, or else we're dead [...]. Every idea and every pursuit of an idea inside us is life [...], the lack of ideas is death.[294]

The apotheosis of this pursuit, which reveals the process that led to it, reunites Will with his sense of "inner space." The paint's embodiment of hope, forgiveness and surprise so uncannily replicates the sound of the milkman's whistle that Will reveals himself as a worthier interpreter of Wersby's composition than Wersby could have dared anticipate.

The sense of shock at the end of the novel echoes Josephine's amazement in *The Ha-Ha* that things that might have been otherwise are in fact the way they are. Her preoccupation with the prehistoric ungulates is reanimated in Will's feeling of defamiliarization as he stares at his hands and thinks of holding 'sherry glasses at parties and talking about who was going to be the next Home Secretary [...]. How strange it was [...]. Hands evolved for tearing meat.'[295] This shock of the uncanny, whose source is the juxtaposition of incongruities, is developed when Julius tries to imagine a world devoid of "art."

> "No tension. No urgency. Nothing held back or delayed. Without art just a frightful slackness [...]. I play to impose a tension over the mindless. Play to control the splaying out of rock and ice and forest. The conquest of the angry, vengeful Gods. And mortality and the wide, loose, open womb of nature."[296]

---

[294] *Correction*, p. 138
[295] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, pp. 196-7
[296] *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*, p. 195

Will echoes this refrain in his perception of Nature as 'the realm of necessity and slackness and death. Art was its interruption. Its arrest.'[297] It is with this realization that "May's burst artery is stemmed" and he understands that, while the river waits in the wings, the choice is his whether to hold a sherry glass or to strive to forge and activate "the places in the heart which do not yet exist." It is in this context that Deleuze and Guattari define art as one of the 'aspects under which the brain becomes subject,' a raft from which it 'plunges into and confronts the chaos.'[298]

The dynamic nature of music, whose conceptual foundations Dawson implies are the same as those of writing, posits an interstitial space symbolically co-existing with the totalizing tendencies of power. It challenges the normalizing drive by existing in defiance of it and yet without denying it, for it is the cry "if it were so" that paradoxically makes it so as the inner world transcends the outer world. This is the context in which Skvorecky defines the 'sole real art there is' as a

> singing about youth when youth is irretrievably gone, singing about your homeland when in the schizophrenia of the times you find yourself in a land that lies over the ocean, a land - no matter how hospitable or friendly - where your heart is not, because you landed on these shores too late.[299]

Lyotard identifies the function of art in similar terms. 'What art can do is bear witness not to the sublime, but to this aporia of art and its pain. It does not say the unsayable, but says it cannot say it,'[300] precisely the "if it were so" dramatized in *A Field of Scarlet Poppies*. Will eventually rejects the false comfort of myth, whose structure ontologically implies repetition and epistemologically connotes predictability, for myth asserts that simply because it once was so, it inevitably will be again and again.

---

297 quoted in *The Bass Saxophone* (prolegomenon)
298 *What is Philosophy?*, p. 210
299 "Foreword: Red Music," in *The Bass Saxophone*, p. 20
300 Lyotard, J.-F., *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* trans. by Andreas Michel & Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 47

In the wake of breakdown, and defining his breakthrough, he inhabits the paradox that to assimilate the "if it were so" is symbolically identical to asserting that "it is." If "the ego" is understood as 'a graveyard scattered with the headstones of lost objects,'[301] Will's breakthrough is signified by the transformation of his experience of the graveyard. His transformation of the obsession with the loss of the past into a celebration of what once was, or of what was seen to have been, reanimates it by this very celebration through which it transcends its loss and is rendered symbolically eternal.

For Will, time is transcended when the composition comes to life and reanimates the field of scarlet poppies. The desensitization produced by the Bomb and by the war in Vietnam is subverted by the realization that exile and the Kingdom are inextricably linked. The Kingdom resides interstitially within exile, as the potential for resistance lies latent within power, as freedom can be forged within the normalizing drive and as the milkman's whistle can be sublimated from the clamour of the public execution. Consequently boundaries lose their meaning as around exile, power, totality and complicity is Wersby's Bach-like superstructure of hope and forgiveness and surprise.

The culmination of *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* reveals the extent of the development of Dawson's fiction. No longer is the protagonist portrayed as being on an absurd, vertiginous and solitary journey between two walls of non-existence. Although the journey remains the same, since *The Ha-Ha* other flies have come into view the impact they exert on one another is shown as having the surprising potential to illuminate the void and bring into focus aspects of the journey that paradoxically

---

[301] Fraser, R., *In Search of a Past: The Manor House, Amnersfield 1933-1945* (London: Verso, 1984), p. 183

enable it to transcend its ontological constraints. The inevitability and finality of death is symbolically transcended by the exhilarating unforeseeability of the route the journey takes, that no application of the normalizing drive can fully or decisively dictate. The field of scarlet poppies, like the milkman's whistle both impervious and oblivious to normalizing forces, is informed by Spinoza's dictum that the liberation of singularities is the ethical cement of collective life.

Whereas in *The Ha-Ha* Josephine's existence is characterized by a sense of the spectacular, Will's in *A Field Of Scarlet Poppies* is defined by a sedimentation of time. This sedimentation is suffused by Wersby's fantasized spirit which Will envisages as a potential Ariadne but which through his obsession comes to function as the maze. In the same way that Foucault defines his works as "a toolbox" rather than a set of solutions, Will comes to realize that Wersby is no magic key that can alone unlock the interstitial. The closest approximation to such a key is the cryptographic information revealed through hope and forgiveness and surprise about unforeseeable combinations of the incidental and the essential, the particular and the universal.

Bibliography

Adorno T. W., *Æsthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970).

- *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. by Anne G. Mitchell & Wesley V. Bloomster (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973).

- *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

- *The Stars Down To Earth and other essays on the irrational in culture*, ed. by S. Crook (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).

Adorno, T. & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by John Cumming (London & New York: Verso, 1992).

Arac, J. (ed.), *After Foucault* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

Arendt, H., *The Burden of Our Time* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951).

- *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Allen & Unwin, 1967).

- *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

- *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Aubrey, C. & Paul Chilton, (eds.), *'Nineteen Eighty-Four' in 1984. Autonomy, Control & Communication* (London: Comedia Publishing Group, 1983).

Barnes, D., *Spillway and Other Stories* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962).

Barnes, M. & J. Berke, *Mary Barnes. Two Accounts of a Journey Through Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

Barthes, R., *A Barthes Reader*, ed. by S. Sontag (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982).

Bauman, Z., *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

Becker, H. S., *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

Beckett, S., *Murphy* (London: Calder Publications, 1993).

- *How It Is*, trans. by the author (London: John Calder, 1996).

Benjamin, W., *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1992).

Berlin, I., *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Bernauer, J. & D. Rasmussen (eds.), *The Final Foucault* (London: The MIT Press, 1994).

Bernhard, T., *Concrete*, trans. by David McLintock (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1984).

- *The Lime Works*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

- *Correction*, trans. by Sophie Wilkins (London: Vintage, 1991).

- *On the Mountain*, trans. by Russell Stockman (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1993).

The Body (London: Granta Publications Ltd., Spring 1992).

Bettelheim, B., *The Informed Heart. Autonomy in a Mass Age* (New York: Avon Books, The Hearst Corporation, 1960).

- *Recollections and Reflections* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992)

Blanchot, M., *Michel Foucault, tel que je l'imagine* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1986).

Bochert, W., *The Man Outside*, trans. by David Porter (London: Calder & Boyars, 1966).

Bollas, C., *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Boyne, Roy, *Foucault and Derrida. The other side of reason* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1990).

Broch, H., *The Sleepwalkers*, trans. by Willa & Edwin Muir (London: Quartet Ltd., 1986).

Burchell, G., C. Gordon & P. Miller, (eds.), *The Foucault Effect* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

Busi, A., *Seminar on Youth*, trans. by Stuart Hood (London: Faber & Faber, 1989).

Camus, A., *L'Etranger*, trans. by Stuart Gilbert (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

Canetti, E., *The Human Province*, trans. by J. Neugroschel (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1985).

- *The Conscience of Words and Earwitness*, trans. by J. Neugroschel (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1987).

- *The Play of the Eyes*, trans. by Ralph Manheim (London: Granta, 1999).

Chamberlain, L., *Nietzsche in Turin* (London: Quartet Books, 1997).

Chomsky, N., *Language and Responsibility* (New York & London: Harvester Press, 1979).

- *Deterring Democracy* (London: Vintage, 1992).

Churchill, C., *Plays: 2* (London: Methuen Drama, 1996).

Cioran, E. M., *A Short History of Decay*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

- *The Trouble With Being Born*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: The Viking Press, 1976).

Connolly, C., *The Unquiet Grave* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

Cooper, B., *Michel Foucault. An Introduction to the Study of his Thought* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).

Cooper, D., *The Grammar of Living* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

- *The Death of the Family* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978).

Cousins, M. & A. Hussain, *Michel Foucault* (Basingstoke & London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1984).

Davidson, A. I. & C. Porter, (eds.), *Foucault and his Interlocuters*, trans. by A. I. Davidson & C. Porter (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

Dawson, J., *The Ha-Ha* (London: Virago, 1985).

- *Fowler's Snare* (London: Anthony Blond, 1962).

- *The Cold Country* (London: Anthony Blond Ltd., 1965).

- *Strawberry Boy* (London: Quartet Books Ltd., 1976).

- *A Field of Scarlet Poppies* (London: Quartet Books, 1979).

- *The Upstairs People* (London: Virago, 1988).

- *Hospital Wedding Stories* (London: Quartet Books, 1978).

Deleuze, G., *Foucault*, trans. by S. Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

- *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1992).

Deleuze, G. & F. Guatarri, *Anti-Œdipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem & Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

- *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by B. Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1986).

- *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by G. Burchell & H. Tomlinson (London & New York: Verso, 1994).

Derrida, J., *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London & New York: Routledge, 2001),

Dilman, I., *Love and Human Separateness* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987).

Doctorow, E. L., *The Book of Daniel* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1982).

- *World's Fair* (London: Picador, 1985).

- *Poets and Presidents. Selected Essays 1977-1992* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1994).

- *The Waterworks* (London: MacMillan London Ltd., 1994).

Dostoyevsky, F., *The Devils*, trans. by D. Magarshack (London: Penguin, 1971).

- *Memoirs from the House of the Dead*, trans. by J. Coulson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

Dreyfus, H. & P. Rabinow (eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

Eco, U., *In the Name of the Rose*, trans. by William Weaver (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1984).

- *Travels In Hyperreality,* trans. by William Weaver (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986).

Fanon, F., *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markman (London: The Pluto Press, 1993).

Faulkner, W., *Absalom, Absalom* (London: Random House, 1995).

Ferguson, S., *A Guard Within* (London: Flamingo/Fontana, 1987).

Foucault, M., *Madness and Civilization*, trans. by R. Howard (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967).

- *The Order of Things: An Archælogy of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1971).
- *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).
- *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by C. Gordon, trans. by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham & K. Soper (Hemel Hempstead: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1980).
- *Language, counter-memory, practice. Selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. by D. Bouchard, trans. by D. F. Bouchard & S. Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980).
- *The Uses of Pleasure*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1985).
- *Remarks on Marx. Converstions with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. by R. James Goldstein & James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991).

Frame, J., *Faces In The Water* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1980).

Fraser, R., *In Search of a Past: The Manor House, Amnersfield 1933-1945* (London: Verso, 1984).

Freud, S., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XVII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955).
- *Moses and Monotheism. The Complete Psychological Writings of Sigmund Freud. Volume XXIII* (London: Hogarth Press, 1964).

Friedenberg, E., *Laing* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1975).

Frisch, M., *Sketchbook, 1946-1949*, trans. by Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977).

Fromm, E., *The Sane Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963).
- *Man for Himself. An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).
- *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
- *The Art of Being* (London: Constable & Co., 1997).
- *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Fussell, P., *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Gasset, Ortega y, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1957).

Geller, J. & M. Harris, *Women of the Asylum* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994).

Gillespie, M. A. & T. B. Strong, (eds.), *Nietzsche's New Seas. Explorations in Philosophy, Aesthetics & Politics* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Goffman, E., *Asylums* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).

Golding, W., *Free Fall* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1985).

Gordon C. & P. Miller, (eds.), *The Foucault Effect* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

Graves, R., *Goodbye To All That* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

Green, H., *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986).

Greer, G., *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999).

Head, B., *A Question of Power* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1974).

Hekman, S. J., (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Foucault* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

Hesse, H., *Demian* (London: Panther Books Ltd., 1971).

- *Autobiographical Writings*, trans. by Denver Lindley (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1972).

- *My Belief*, trans. by Denver Lindley (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1985).

Høeg, P., *Borderliners* (London: The Harvill Press, 1996).

- *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (London: The Harvill Press, 1996).

- *Tales of the Night*, trans. by Barbara Haveland (London: The Harvill Press, 1998).

Holmes Coleman, E., *The Shutter Of Snow* (London: Virago, 1981).

Howarth-Williams, M., *R.D. Laing. His work and its relevance for sociology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977).

Huxley, A., *After Many a Summer* (New York: The Vanguard Library, 1953).

Illich, I., *Tools for Conviviality* (London: Marion Boyars, 1990).

Jackson, G., *Soledad Brother. The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

James, A., *The Diary of Alice James*, ed. by Leon Edel (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1964).

Jameson, S., *None Turn Back* (London: Virago, 1984).

Jaspers, K., *Philosophy Volume 2*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Jones, C. & R. Porter (eds.), *Reassessing Foucault. Power, Medicine and the Body* (London: Routledge, 1993)

Journal of American Studies, 1:8

Joyce, J., *Dubliners* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).

Juenger, E., *On The Marble Cliffs*, trans. by Stuart Hood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).

Jung, C.G., *The Undiscovered Self*, trans. by R. Hull (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1958).

Kafka, F., *The Trial*, trans. by Willa & Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953).

Kirsner, D., *The Schizoid World of Jean-Paul Sartre & R. D. Laing* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1976).

Koestler, A., *Darkness at Noon*, trans. by Daphne Hardy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

Konwicki, T., *A Minor Apocalypse*, trans. by Richard Lourie (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1984).

Krim, S., *Views of a Nearsighted Cannoneer* (New York: Excelsior Press, 1961).

Kritzman, L. D., (ed.), *Michel Foucault. Politics Philosophy Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, trans. by A. Sheridan & others (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

Kundera, M., *The Art of the Novel*, trans. by Linda Asher (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1988).

Laing, R. D., *Knots* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

- *The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

- *The Politics of the Family and Other Essays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

- *Sonnets* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1979).

- *Self and Others* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

Laing, R. D. & D. Cooper, *Reason and Violence. A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy 1950-1960* (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1971).

Laing, R. D. & A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness and the Family. An investigation into the "forgotten illness" - schizophrenia* (London: Penguin, 1987).

Laplanche, J. & J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press & the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1973).

Le Bon, G., *The Crowd. A Study of the Popular Mind* (Marietta, Georgia: Larlin Corporation, 1982).

Lessing, D., *Memoirs of a Survivor* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1976).

- *The Good Terrorist* (London: Harper Collins, 1990).

- *Briefing For A Descent Into Hell* (London: Harper Collins, 1994).

Levi, P., *The Mirror Maker*, trans. by R. Rosenthal (London: Minerva, 1989).

- *The Periodic Table*, trans. by R. Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1997).

Lévi-Strauss, C., *The Raw And The Cooked*, trans. by John & Doreen Wightman (New York: Harper Row, 1969).

Lotringer, S. (ed.), *Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989).

Lyotard, J.-F., *Heidegger and "The Jews,"* trans. by Andreas Michel & Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

Macey, D., *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (London: Vintage, 1994).

Magee, B., *The Great Philosophers* (London: BBC Books, 1987).

Magee, B. & M. Milligan, *On Blindness* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Mandelstam, N., *Hope Against Hope* trans. by M. Hayward, (London: Collins Harvill, 1989).

Marcuse, H., *The Æsthetic Dimension: Towards A Critique of Marxist Æsthetic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

Maudsley, H., *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: Kegan Paul, 1874).

May, T., *'Between Genealogy and Epistemology.' Psychology, Politics and Knowledge in theTthought of Michel Foucault* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

McNay, L., *Foucault and Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

Mercer, D., *In Two Minds* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967).

Miller, J., *The Passions of Michel Foucault* (London: Flamingo, HarperCollins, 1994).

Mitchell, J., *Mad Men and Medusas. Reclaiming hysteria and the effects of sibling relations on the human condition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).

Montale, A., *Poet in Our Time*, trans. by Alastair Hamilton (London: Marion Boyars, 1976).

Moss, J. (ed.), *The Later Foucault* (London: Sage Publications, 1998).

Muller, H. J., *Freedom in the Western World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

Murdoch, I., *Bruno's Dream* (St. Albans: Triad/Panther, 1980).

- *The Good Apprentice* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985).

- *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993).

New Left Review (eds.), *Exterminism and Cold War* (London: Verso Editions & N. L. R., 1982).

New York Times News Service, April 17, 1990

Nietzsche, F., *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956).

- *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1968).

- *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. by R. J. Holingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).

- *The Gay Science*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974).

- *On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1998)

Ondaatje, M., *The English Patient* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd., 1992).

Orwell, G., *Collected Essays volume 2*, ed. by S. Orwell & I. Angus (New York: Harcourt, 1968).

- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Signet, 1983).

Oz, A., *To Know A Woman*, trans. by Nicholas de Lange (London: Vintage, 1992).

Phillips, A., *Darwin's Worms* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1999).

Pilger, J., *Heroes* (London: Pan Books Ltd., 1986).

Pirie, M., *Micropolitics* (Aldershot: Wildwood House Ltd., 1988).

Porter, R., (ed.), *The Faber Book of Madness* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991).

de Quincey, T., *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994).

Rabinow, P., (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).

- *Michel Foucault. Ethics. The Essential Works 1* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997).

Racevskis, K., *Michel Foucault and the Subversion of the Intellect* (Ithaca & London : Cornell University Press, 1983).

Rajchman, J., *Michel Foucault. The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

- *Truth and Eros. Foucault, Lacan and the Question of Ethics* (New York & London: Routledge, 1991).

Ramazanoglu, C., (ed.), *Up Against Foucault* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993).

Ransom, J. S., *Foucault's Discipline* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997).

Raus, C., *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Michel Foucault* (London: The Athlone Press, 1986).

Reck-Malleczewen, F., *Diary of A Man in Despair*, trans. by Paul Rubens (London: Duckworth, 2000).

The Renaissance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Rhys, J, *Tigers are Better Looking* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

Rilke, R. M., *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. by M. D. Herter Norton (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992).

Sacks, O., *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1986).

Samuels, R., *Between Philosophy & Psychoanalysis. Lacan's Reconstruction of Freud* (London: Routledge, 1993).

Sargent, W., *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

Sartre, J.-P., *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. by P. Mairet (London: Methuen, 1974).

- *Words*, trans. by I. Clephane (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

- *What Is Literature?*, trans. by B. Frechtman (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1978).

Sass, L., *The Paradoxes of Delusion. Wittgenstein, Schreber and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, New York & London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

Schopenhauer, A., *The World as Will and Representation Vol. 1*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1966).

Schumacher, E. F., *A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Vintage, 1995).

Sedgwick, P., *Psychopolitics* (London: Pluto, 1982).

Shreber, D., *Memoirs of My Mental Illness*, trans. by Ida MacAlpine and Richard Hunter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

Smart, B., *Postmodernity* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997).

Solzhenitsyn, A., *Candle In The Wind*, trans. by Keith Armes (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).

Spence, D. P., *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton & Co., 1982).

Steiner, G., *Extra-Territorial. Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972).

- *Language and Silence. Essays 1958-1966* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1990).

- *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber & Faber, 2001).

Still, A. & I. Velody, (eds.), *Rewriting the history of madness. Studies in Foucault's Histoire de la folie* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992).

Svevo, I., *Confessions of Zeno*, trans. by Beryl de Zoete (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964).

Svorecky, J., *The Bass Saxophone,* trans. by Kaca Polackova (London: Picador, Pan Books Ltd., 1980).

Szasz, T., *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961).

- *Ideology and Insanity. Essays on the Psychiatric Dehumanization of Man* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973).

- *The Second Sin* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1973).

- *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

- *Law, Liberty and Psychiatry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974).

- *The Manufacture of Madness* (St Albans & London: Granada Publishing Ltd., Paladin Books, 1977).

- *The Untamed Tongue* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1990).

- *A Lexicon of Lunacy* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction Publishers, 1993).

- *Cruel Compassion* (New York: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 1994).

- *Insanity. The Idea and its Consequences* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

- (ed.), *The Age of Madness* (New York & London: Jason Aronson, 1974).

de Tocqueville, A., *Democracy in America, vol. 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945).

Trautmann Banks, J., *Congenial Spirits. Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1993).

Visker, R., *Michel Foucault. Genealogy as Critique*, trans. by Chris Turner (London & New York: Verso, 1995).

Vivas, E., *The Moral Life and the Ethical Life* (Chicago: Regnery-Gateway, 1963).

Ward, M. J., *The Snake Pit* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1947).

Whitehead, A. N., *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: Free Press, 1961).

Wiesel, E., *The Fifth Son*, trans. by Marion Wiesel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

Wolfenstein, M. & N. Leites, *Movies* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1950).

Woolf, V., *Mrs. Dalloway* (London: Harvest Books, 1990).

Wright, R., *Black Boy* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1977).

Zamyatin, Y., *We*, trans. by Bernard Guilbert Guerney (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983).

Zivkovic, Z., *Time's Gifts*, trans. by Alice Copple-Tosic (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1997).

Internet Addresses

http://lessing.redmood.com/unexamined.html

http://lessing.redmood.com/theprogressive.html

http://lessing.redmood.com/partisan.html

http://www.edmontonjournal.com/sens/0411two.html

http://www.fu-berlin.de/foucault-tribunal/indictment.htm